

PUBLIC DOMAIN SHORT STORIES - JULY 2016

Anthology by Matt Pierard.

THE PASSING OF COCK-EYE BLACKLOCK, BY Frank Norris

A FRONTIER ROMANCE: A TALE OF JUMEL MANSION, by Will Lillibridge

THE FAMILY FRIEND, by Mary Roberts Rinehart

THE REST CURE, by E. W. Hornung

THE END OF BUKAWAI, by Edgar Rice Burroughs

THE DENVER EXPRESS. by A.A. Hayes

RIGHT ALWAYS REMAINS RIGHT, by Albert Henry Wratishaw

THE DUN HORSE, by George Bird Grinnell

THE REINCARNATION OF TAMA, by Yei Theodora Ozaki

JOSEPH: A STORY, by Katherine Rickford

THE MEN IN THE STORM, by Stephen Crane

NOT ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE, by Mary Stewart Cutting

THE PASSING OF COCK-EYE BLACKLOCK

from Project Gutenberg's A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories, by Frank Norris

"Well, m'son," observed Bunt about half an hour after supper, "if your provender has shook down comfortable by now, we might as well jar loose and be moving along out yonder."

We left the fire and moved toward the hobbled ponies, Bunt complaining of the quality of the outfit's meals. "Down in the Panamint country," he growled, "we had a Chink that was a sure frying-pan expert; but _this_ Dago--my word! That ain't victuals, that supper. That's just a' ingenious device for removing superfluous appetite. Next time I assimilate nutriment in this camp I'm sure going to take chloroform beforehand. Careful to draw your cinch tight on that pinto bronc' of yours. She always swells up same as a horned toad soon as you begin to saddle up."

We rode from the circle of the camp-fire's light and out upon the desert. It was Bunt's turn to ride the herd that night, and I had volunteered to bear him company.

Bunt was one of a fast-disappearing type. He knew his West as the cockney knows his Piccadilly. He had mined with and for Ralston, had soldiered with Crook, had turned cards in a faro game at Laredo, and had known the Apache Kid. He had fifteen separate and different times driven the herds from Texas to Dodge City, in the good old, rare old, wild old days when Dodge was the headquarters for the cattle trade, and as near to heaven as the cowboy cared to get. He had seen the end of gold and the end of the buffalo, the beginning of cattle, the beginning of wheat, and the spreading of the barbed-wire fence, that, in the end, will take from him his occupation and his revolver, his chaparejos and his usefulness, his lariat and his reason for being. He had seen the rise of a new period, the successive stages of which, singularly enough, tally exactly with the progress of our own world-civilization: first the nomad and hunter, then the herder, next and last the husband-man. He had passed the mid-mark of his life. His mustache was gray. He had four friends--his horse, his pistol, a teamster in the Indian Territory Panhandle named Skinny, and me.

The herd--I suppose all told there were some two thousand head--we found not far from the water-hole. We relieved the other watch and took up our night's vigil. It was about nine o'clock. The night was fine, calm.

There was no cloud. Toward the middle watches one could expect a moon. But the stars, the stars! In Idaho, on those lonely reaches of desert and range, where the shadow of the sun by day and the courses of the constellations by night are the only things that move, these stars are a different matter from those bleared pin-points of the city after dark, seen through dust and smoke and the glare of electrics and the hot haze

of fire-signs. On such a night as that when I rode the herd with Bunt
anything might have happened; one could have believed in fairies then,
and in the buffalo-ghost, and in all the weirds of the craziest Apache
"Messiah" that ever made medicine.

One remembered astronomy and the "measureless distances" and the showy
problems, including the rapid moving of a ray of light and the long
years of its travel between star and star, and smiled incredulously.
Why, the stars were just above our heads, were not much higher than the
flat-topped hills that barred the horizons. Venus was a yellow lamp hung
in a tree; Mars a red lantern in a clock-tower.

One listened instinctively for the tramp of the constellations. Orion,
Cassiopeia and Ursa Major marched to and fro on the vault like cohorts
of legionaries, seemingly within call of our voices, and all without a
sound.

But beneath these quiet heavens the earth disengaged multitudinous
sounds--small sounds, minimized as it were by the muffling of the night.
Now it was the yap of a coyote leagues away; now the snapping of a twig
in the sage-brush; now the mysterious, indefinable stir of the
heat-ridden land cooling under the night. But more often it was the
confused murmur of the herd itself--the click of a horn, the friction of
heavy bodies, the stamp of a hoof, with now and then the low,
complaining note of a cow with a calf, or the subdued noise of a steer
as it lay down, first lurching to the knees, then rolling clumsily upon
the haunch, with a long, stertorous breath of satisfaction.

Slowly at Indian trot we encircle the herd. Earlier in the evening a
prairie-wolf had pulled down a calf, and the beasts were still restless.

Little eddies of nervousness at long intervals developed here and there
in the mass--eddies that not impossibly might widen at any time with
perilous quickness to the maelstrom of a stampede. So as he rode Bunt
sang to these great brutes, literally to put them to sleep--sang an old
grandmother's song, with all the quaint modulations of sixty, seventy, a
hundred years ago:

"With her ogling winks
And bobbling blinks,
Her quizzing glass,
Her one eye idle,
Oh, she loved a bold dragoon,
With his broadsword, saddle, bridle.
Whack, fol-de-rol!"

I remember that song. My grandmother--so they tell me--used to sing it
in Carolina, in the thirties, accompanying herself on a harp, if you
please:

"Oh, she loved a bold dragoon,
With his broadsword, saddle, bridle."

It was in Charleston, I remembered, and the slave-ships used to discharge there in those days. My grandmother had sung it then to her beaux; officers they were; no wonder she chose it--"Oh, she loved a bold dragoon"--and now I heard it sung on an Idaho cattle-range to quiet two thousand restless steers.

Our talk at first, after the cattle had quieted down, ran upon all manner of subjects. It is astonishing to note what strange things men will talk about at night and in a solitude. That night we covered religion, of course, astronomy, love affairs, horses, travel, history, poker, photography, basket-making, and the Darwinian theory. But at last inevitably we came back to cattle and the pleasures and dangers of riding the herd.

"I rode herd once in Nevada," remarked Bunt, "and I was caught into a blizzard, and I was sure freezing to death. Got to where I couldn't keep my eyes open, I was that sleepy. Tell you what I did. Had some eating-tobacco along, and I'd chew it a spell, then rub the juice into my eyes. Kept it up all night. Blame near blinded me, but I come through. Me and another man named Blacklock--Cock-eye Blacklock we called him, by reason of his having one eye that was some out of line. Cock-eye sure ought to have got it that night, for he went bad afterward, and did a heap of killing before he did get it. He was a bad man for sure, and the way he died is a story in itself."

There was a long pause. The ponies jogged on. Rounding on the herd, we turned southward.

"He did 'get it' finally, you say," I prompted.

"He certainly did," said Bunt, "and the story of it is what a man with a' imaginary mind like you ought to make into one of your friction tales."

"Is it about a treasure?" I asked with apprehension. For ever since I once made a tale (of friction) out of one of Bunt's stories of real life, he has been ambitious for me to write another, and is forever suggesting motifs which invariably--I say invariably--imply the discovery of great treasures. With him, fictitious literature must always turn upon the discovery of hidden wealth.

"No," said he, "it ain't about no treasure, but just about the origin, hist'ry and development--and subsequent decease--of as mean a Greaser as ever stole stock, which his name was Cock-eye Blacklock."

"You see, this same Blacklock went bad about two summers after our meet-up with the blizzard. He worked down Yuma way and over into New Mexico, where he picks up with a sure-thing gambler, and the two begin to devastate the population. They do say when he and his running mate got good and through with that part of the Land of the Brave, men used to go round trading guns for commissary, and clothes for ponies, and cigars for whisky and such. There just wasn't any money left _anywhere_. Those sharps had drawn the landscape clean. Some one found a dollar in a floor-crack in a saloon, and the barkeep' gave him a gallon of forty-rod for it, and used to keep it in a box for exhibition, and the crowd would get around it and paw it over and say: 'My! my! Whatever in the world is this extremely cu-roos coin?'

"Then Blacklock cuts loose from his running mate, and plays a lone hand through Arizona and Nevada, up as far as Reno again, and there he stacks up against a kid--a little tenderfoot kid so new he ain't cracked the green paint off him--and _skins_ him. And the kid, being foolish and impulsive-like, pulls out a peashooter. It was a _twenty-two_, " said Bunt, solemnly. "Yes, the kid was just that pore, pathetic kind to carry a dinky twenty-two, and with the tears runnin' down his cheeks begins to talk tall. Now what does that Cockeye do? Why, that pore kid that he had skinned couldn't 'a' hurt him with his pore little bric-à-brac. Does Cock-eye take his little parlour ornament away from him, and spank him, and tell him to go home? No, he never. The kid's little tin pop-shooter explodes right in his hand before he can crook his forefinger twice, and while he's a-wondering what-all has happened Cock-eye gets his two guns on him, slow and deliberate like, mind you, and throws forty-eights into him till he ain't worth shooting at no more. Murders him like the mud-eating, horse-thieving snake of a Greaser that he is; but being within the law, the kid drawing on him first, he don't stretch hemp the way he should.

"Well, fin'ly this Blacklock blows into a mining-camp in Placer County, California, where I'm chuck-tending on the night-shift. This here camp is maybe four miles across the divide from Iowa Hill, and it sure is named a cu-roos name, which it is Why-not. They is a barn contiguous, where the mine horses are kep', and, blame me! if there ain't a weathercock on top of that same--a golden trotting-horse--_upside down_. When the stranger an' pilgrim comes in, says he first off: 'Why'n snakes they got that weathercock horse upside down--why?' says he. 'Why-not,' says you, and the drinks is on the pilgrim.

"That all went very lovely till some gesabe opens up a placer drift on the far side the divide, starts a rival camp, an' names her Because. The Boss gets mad at that, and rights up the weathercock, and renames the camp Ophir, and you don't work no more pilgrims.

"Well, as I was saying, Cock-eye drifts into Why-not and begins diffusing trouble. He skins some of the boys in the hotel over in town,

and a big row comes of it, and one of the bed-rock cleaners cuts loose with both guns. Nobody hurt but a quarter-breed, who loses a' eye. But the marshal don't stand for no short-card men, an' closes Cock-eye up some prompt. Him being forced to give the boys back their money is busted an' can't get away from camp. To raise some wind he begins depredating.

"He robs a pore half-breed of a cayuse, and shoots up a Chink who's panning tailings, and generally and variously becomes too pronounced, till he's run outen camp. He's sure stony-broke, not being able to turn a card because of the marshal. So he goes to live in a ole cabin up by the mine ditch, and sits there doing a heap o' thinking, and hatching trouble like a' ole he-hen.

"Well, now, with that deporting of Cock-eye comes his turn of bad luck, and it sure winds his clock up with a loud report. I've narrated special of the scope and range of this 'ere Blacklock, so as you'll understand why it was expedient and desirable that he should up an' die. You see, he always managed, with all his killings and robbings and general and sundry flimflamming, to be just within the law. And if anybody took a notion to shoot him up, why, his luck saw him through, and the other man's shooting-iron missed fire, or exploded, or threw wild, or such like, till it seemed as if he sure did bear a charmed life; and so he did till a pore yeller tamale of a fool dog did for him what the law of the land couldn't do. Yes, sir, a fool dog, a pup, a blame yeller pup named Sloppy Weather, did for Cock-eye Blacklock, sporting character, three-card-monte man, sure-thing sharp, killer, and general bedeviler.

"You see, it was this way. Over in American Cañon, some five miles maybe back of the mine, they was a creek called the American River, and it was sure chock-a-block full of trouts. The Boss used for to go over there with a dinky fish-pole like a buggy-whip about once a week, and scout that stream for fish and bring back a basketful. He was sure keen on it, and had bought some kind of privilege or other, so as he could keep other people off.

"Well, I used to go along with him to pack the truck, and one Saturday, about a month after Cock-eye had been run outen camp, we hiked up over the divide, and went for to round up a bunch o' trouts. When we got to the river there was a mess for your life. Say, that river was full of dead trouts, floating atop the water; and they was some even on the bank. Not a scratch on 'em; just dead. The Boss had the papsy-lals. I never did see a man so rip-r'aring, snorting mad. I hadn't a guess about what we were up against, but he knew, and he showed down. He said somebody had been shooting the river for fish to sell down Sacramento way to the market. A mean trick; kill more fish in one shoot than you can possibly pack.

"Well, we didn't do much fishing that day--couldn't get a bite, for that

matter--and took on home about noon to talk it over. You see, the Boss, in buying the privileges or such for that creek, had made himself responsible to the Fish Commissioners of the State, and 'twasn't a week before they were after him, camping on his trail incessant, and wanting to know how about it. The Boss was some worried, because the fish were being killed right along, and the Commission was making him weary of living. Twicet afterward we prospected along that river and found the same lot of dead fish. We even put a guard there, but it didn't do no manner of good.

"It's the Boss who first suspicions Cock-eye. But it don't take no seventh daughter of no seventh daughter to trace trouble where Black-lock's about. He sudden shows up in town with a bunch of simoleons, buying bacon and tin cows [Footnote: Condensed milk.] and such provender, and generally giving it away that he's come into money. The Boss, who's watching his movements sharp, says to me one day:

"'Bunt, the storm-centre of this here low area is a man with a cock-eye, an' I'll back that play with a paint horse against a paper dime.'

"'No takers,' says I. 'Dirty work and a cock-eyed man are two heels of the same mule.'

"'Which it's a-kicking of me in the stummick frequent and painful,' he remarks, plenty wrathful.

"'On general principles,' I said, 'it's a royal flush to a pair of deuces as how this Blacklock bird ought to stop a heap of lead, and I know the man to throw it. He's the only brother of my sister, and tends chuck in a placer mine. How about if I take a day off and drop round to his cabin and interview him on the fleetin' and unstable nature of human life?'

"But the Boss wouldn't hear of that.

"'No,' says he; 'that's not the bluff to back in this game. You an' me an' 'Mary-go-round'--that was what we called the marshal, him being so much all over the country--'you an' me an' Mary-go-round will have to stock a sure-thing deck against that maverick.'

"So the three of us gets together an' has a talky-talk, an' we lays it out as how Cock-eye must be watched and caught red-handed.

"Well, let me tell you, keeping case on that Greaser sure did lack a certain indefinable charm. We tried him at sun-up, an' again at sundown, an' nights, too, laying in the chaparral an' tarweed, an' scouting up an' down that blame river, till we were sore. We built surreptitious a lot of shooting-boxes up in trees on the far side of the cañon, overlooking certain an' sundry pools in the river where Cock-eye would

be likely to pursue operations, an' we took turns watching. I'll be a Chink if that bad egg didn't put it on us same as previous, an' we'd find new-killed fish all the time. I tell you we were fitchered; and it got on the Boss's nerves. The Commission began to talk of withdrawing the privilege, an' it was up to him to make good or pass the deal. We knew Blacklock was shooting the river, y' see, but we didn't have no evidence. Y' see, being shut off from card-sharping, he was up against it, and so took to pot-hunting to get along. It was as plain as red paint.

"Well, things went along sort of catch-as-catch-can like this for maybe three weeks, the Greaser shooting fish regular, an' the Boss b'iling with rage, and laying plans to call his hand, and getting bluffed out every deal.

"And right here I got to interrupt, to talk some about the pup dog, Sloppy Weather. If he hadn't got caught up into this Blacklock game, no one'd ever thought enough about him to so much as kick him. But after it was all over, we began to remember this same Sloppy an' to recall what he was; no big job. He was just a worthless fool pup, yeller at that, everybody's dog, that just hung round camp, grinning and giggling and playing the goat, as half-grown dogs will. He used to go along with the car-boys when they went swimmin' in the resevoy, an' dash along in an' yell an' splash round just to show off. He thought it was a keen stunt to get some gesabe to throw a stick in the resevoy so's he could paddle out after it. They'd trained him always to bring it back an' fetch it to whichever party throwed it. He'd give it up when he'd retrieved it, an' yell to have it throwed again. That was his idea of fun--just like a fool pup.

"Well, one day this Sloppy Weather is off chasing jack-rabbits an' don't come home. Nobody thinks anything about that, nor even notices it. But we afterward finds out that he'd met up with Blacklock that day, an' stopped to visit with him--sorry day for Cockeye. Now it was the very next day after this that Mary-go-round an' the Boss plans another scout. I'm to go, too. It was a Wednesday, an' we lay it out that the Cockeye would prob'ly shoot that day so's to get his fish down to the railroad Thursday, so they'd reach Sacramento Friday--fish day, see. It wasn't much to go by, but it was the high card in our hand, an' we allowed to draw to it.

"We left Why-not afore daybreak, an' worked over into the cañon about sun-up. They was one big pool we hadn't covered for some time, an' we made out we'd watch that. So we worked down to it, an' clumb up into our trees, an' set out to keep guard.

"In about an hour we heard a shoot some mile or so up the creek. They's no mistaking dynamite, leastways not to miners, an' we knew that shoot was dynamite an' nothing else. The Cock-eye was at work, an' we shook

hands all round. Then pretty soon a fish or so began to go by--big fellows, some of 'em, dead an' floatin', with their eyes popped 'way out same as knobs--sure sign they'd been shot.

"The Boss took and grit his teeth when he see a three-pounder go by, an' made remarks about Blacklock.

""Sh!' says Mary-go-round, sudden-like. 'Listen!'

"We turned ear down the wind, an' sure there was the sound of some one scrabbling along the boulders by the riverside. Then we heard a pup yap.

""That's our man,' whispers the Boss.

"For a long time we thought Cock-eye had quit for the day an' had copped us again, but byne-by we heard the manzanita crack on the far side the cañon, an' there at last we see Blacklock working down toward the pool, Sloppy Weather following an' yapping and cayoodling just as a fool dog will.

"Blacklock comes down to the edge of the water quiet-like. He lays his big scoop-net an' his sack--we can see it half full already--down behind a boulder, and takes a good squinting look all round, and listens maybe twenty minutes, he's that cute, same's a coyote stealing sheep. We lies low an' says nothing, fear he might see the leaves move.

"Then byne-by he takes his stick of dynamite out his hip pocket--he was just that reckless kind to carry it that way--an' ties it careful to a couple of stones he finds handy. Then he lights the fuse an' heaves her into the drink, an' just there's where Cock-eye makes the mistake of his life. He ain't tied the rocks tight enough, an' the loop slips off just as he swings back his arm, the stones drop straight down by his feet, and the stick of dynamite whirls out right enough into the pool.

"Then the funny business begins.

"Blacklock ain't made no note of Sloppy Weather, who's been sizing up the whole game an' watchin' for the stick. Soon as Cock-eye heaves the dynamite into the water, off goes the pup after it, just as he'd been taught to do by the car-boys.

""Hey, you fool dog!' yells Blacklock.

"A lot that pup cares. He heads out for that stick of dynamite same as if for a veal cutlet, reaches it, grabs hold of it, an' starts back for shore, with the fuse sputterin' like hot grease. Blacklock heaves rocks at him like one possessed, capering an' dancing; but the pup comes right on. The Cock-eye can't stand it no longer, but lines out. But the pup's got to shore an' takes after him. Sure; why not? He think's it's all

part of the game. Takes after Cock-eye, running to beat a' express, while we-all whoops and yells an' nearly falls out the trees for laffing. Hi! Cock-eye did scratch gravel for sure. But 'tain't no manner of use. He can't run through that rough ground like Sloppy Weather, an' that fool pup comes a-cavartin' along, jumpin' up against him, an' him a-kickin' him away, an' r'arin', an' dancin', an' shakin' his fists, an' the more he r'ars the more fun the pup thinks it is. But all at once something big happens, an' the whole bank of the cañon opens out like a big wave, and slops over into the pool, an' the air is full of trees an' rocks and cart-loads of dirt an' dogs and Blacklocks and rivers an' smoke an' fire generally. The Boss got a clod o' river-mud spang in the eye, an' went off his limb like's he was trying to bust a bucking bronc' an' couldn't; and ol' Mary-go-round was shooting off his gun on general principles, glarin' round wild-eyed an' like as if he saw a' Injun devil.

"When the smoke had cleared away an' the trees and rocks quit falling, we clumb down from our places an' started in to look for Black-lock. We found a good deal of him, but they wasn't hide nor hair left of Sloppy Weather. We didn't have to dig no grave, either. They was a big enough hole in the ground to bury a horse an' wagon, let alone Cock-eye. So we planted him there, an' put up a board, an' wrote on it:

Here lies most
of
C. BLACKLOCK,
who died of a'
entangling alliance with
a
stick of dynamite.

Moral: A hook and line is good enough
fish-tackle for any honest man.

"That there board lasted for two years, till the freshet of '82, when the American River--Hello, there's the sun!"

All in a minute the night seemed to have closed up like a great book. The East flamed roseate. The air was cold, nimble. Some of the sage-brush bore a thin rim of frost. The herd, aroused, the dew glistening on flank and horn, were chewing the first cud of the day, and in twos and threes moving toward the water-hole for the morning's drink. Far off toward the camp the breakfast fire sent a shaft of blue smoke straight into the moveless air. A jack-rabbit, with erect ears, limped from the sage-brush just out of pistol-shot and regarded us a moment, his nose wrinkling and trembling. By the time that Bunt and I, putting our ponies to a canter, had pulled up by the camp of the Bar-circle-Z outfit, another day had begun in Idaho.

A FRONTIER ROMANCE: A TALE OF JUMEL MANSION

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of A Breath of Prairie and other stories, by Will Lillibridge

I

A new settlement in a new country: no contemporary mind can conceive the possibilities of future greatness that lie in the fulfilment of its prophecy.

A long, irregular quadrangle has been hewn from the woods bordering the north bank of the Ohio River. Scattered through the clearing are rude houses, built of the forest logs. Bounding the space upon three sides, and so close that its storm music sounds plain in every ear, is the forest itself. On the fourth side flows the wide river, covered now, firm and silent, with a thick ice blanket. Across the river on the Kentucky shore, softened by the blue haze of distance, another forest crowds down to the very water's edge.

It is night, and of the cabins in the clearing each reflects, in one way or another, the character of its builder. Here a broad pencil of light writes "Careless!" on the black sheet of the forest; there a mere thread escaping tells of patient carpentry.

At one end of the clearing, so near the forest that the top of a falling tree would have touched it, stood a cabin, individual in its complete darkness except for a dull ruddy glow at one end, where a window extended as high as the eaves. An open fire within gnawed at the half-green logs, sending smoke and steam up the cavernous chimney, and casting about the room an uncertain, fitful light--now bright, again shadowy.

It was a bare room that the flickering firelight revealed, bare alike as to its furnishings and the freshness of its peeled logs, the spaces between which had been "chinked" with clay from the river-bank. Scarcely a thing built of man was in sight which had not been designed to kill; scarcely a product of Nature which had not been gathered at cost of animal life. Guns of English make, stretched horizontally along the walls upon pegs driven into the logs; in the end opposite the wide fireplace, home-made cooking utensils dangled from the end of a rough table, itself a product of the same factory. In front of the fire, just beyond the blaze and the coals and ashes, were heaped the pelts of various animals; black bear and cinnamon rested side by side with the rough, shaggy fur of the buffalo, brought by Indians from the far western land of the Dakotas.

Upon the heap, dressed in the picturesque utility garb of buckskin, homespun, and "hickory" which stamped the pioneer of his day, a big man lay at full length: a large man even here, where the law of the

fittest reigned supreme. A stubbly growth of beard covered his face, giving it the heavy expression common to those accustomed to silent places, and dim forest trails.

Aside from his size, there was nothing striking or handsome about this backwoods giant, neither of face nor of form; yet, sleeping or waking, working or at leisure, he would be noticed--and remembered. In his every feature, every action, was the absolute unconsciousness of self, which cannot be mistaken; whether active or passive, there was about him an insinuation of reserve force, subtly felt, of a strong, determined character, impossible to sway or bend. He lay, now, motionless, staring with wide-open eyes into the fire and breathing slowly, deeply, like one in sleep.

There was a hammering upon the door; another, louder; then a rattling that made the walls vibrate.

"Come!" called the man, rousing and rolling away from the fire.

A heavy shoulder struck the door hard, and the screaming wooden hinges covered the sound of the entering footfall.

He who came was also of the type: homespun and buckskin, hair long and face unshaven. He straightened from a passage which was not low, then turning pushed the unwieldy door shut. It closed reluctantly, with a loud shrilling of its frost-bound hinges and frame. In a moment he dropped his hands and impatiently kicked the stubborn offender home, the suction drawing a puff of smoke from the fireplace into the room, and sending the ashes spinning in miniature whirlwinds upon the hearth.

The man on the floor contemplated the entry with indifference; but a new light entered his eyes as he recognized his visitor, though his face held like wood.

"Evenin', Clayton," he greeted, nodding toward a stool by the hearth. "Come over 'n sit down to the entertainment." A whimsical smile struggled through the heavy whiskers. "I've been seeing all sorts of things in there"--a thoughtful nod toward the fire. "Guess, though, a fellow generally does see what he's looking for in this world."

"See here, Bud," the visitor bluntly broke in, coming into the light and slurring a dialect of no nationality pure, "y' can't stop me thataway. There ain't no use talkin' about the weather, neither." A motion of impatience; then swifter, with a shade of menace:

"You know what I came over fer. It's actin' the fool, I know, we few families out here weeks away from ev'rybody, but this clearin' can't hold us both."

The menace suddenly left the voice, unconsciously giving place to a note of tenderness and of vague self-fear.

"I love that girl better 'n you er life er anything else, Bud; I tell ye this square to yer face. I can't stand it. I followed ye last night clean home from the party--an' I had a knife. I jest couldn't help it. Every time I know nex' time it'll happen. I don't ask ye to give her up, Bud, but to settle it with me now, fair an' open, 'fore I do something I can't help."

He strode swiftly to and fro across the room as he spoke, his skin-shod feet tapping muffled upon the bare floor, like the pads of an animal. The fur of his leggings, rubbing together as he walked, generated static sparks which snapped audibly. He halted presently by the fireplace, and looked down at the man lying there.

"It's 'tween us, Bud," he said, passion quivering in his voice.

Minutes passed before Bud Ellis spoke, then he shifted his head, quickly, and for the first time squarely met Clayton's eyes.

"You say it's between you and me," he initiated slowly: "how do you propose to settle it?"

The other man hesitated, then his face grew red.

"Ye make it hard for me, Bud, 's though I was a boy talkin' to ye big here; but it's true, as I told ye: I ain't myself when I see ye settin' close to 'Liz'beth, er dancin' with your arm touchin' hern. I ain't no coward, Bud; an' I can't give her up--to you ner nobody else.

"I hate it. We've always been like brothers afore, an' it 'pears kinder dreamy 'n foolish 'n unnatural us settin' here talkin' 'bout it; but there ain't no other way I can see. I give ye yer choice, Bud: I'll fight ye fair any way y' want."

Ellis's attitude remained unchanged: one big hand supported his chin while he gazed silently into the fire. Clayton stood contemplating him a moment, then sat down.

By and by Ellis's head moved a little, a very little, and their eyes again met. A minute passed, and in those seconds the civilization of each man moved back generations.

The strain was beyond Clayton; he bounded to his feet with a motion that sent the stool spinning.

"God A'mighty! Are y' wood er are y' a coward? Y' seem to think I'm practisin' speech-makin'. D'ye know what it means fer me to come up here like this to you?" He waited, but there was no response.

"I tell ye fer the last time, I love that girl, an' if it warn't fer you--fer you, Bud Ellis--she'd marry me. Can ye understand that? Now will ye fight?--or won't ye?"

A movement, swift and easy, like a released spring, the unconscious trick of a born athlete, and Ellis was upon his feet. Involuntarily, Clayton squared himself, as if an attack were imminent.

"No, I won't fight you," said the big man, slowly. Without the least hesitation, he advanced and laid a hand upon the other man's shoulder, facing him at arm's length and speaking deliberately.

"It isn't that I'm afraid of you, either, Bert Clayton; you know it. You say you love her; I believe you. I love her, too. And Elizabeth--you have tried, and I have tried--and she told us both the same.

"God, man! I know how you feel. I've expected something like this a long time." He drew his hand across his eyes, and turned away. "I've had murder in my heart when I saw you, and hated myself. It's only in such places as this, where nothing happens to divert one's mind, that people get like you and me, Bert. We brood and brood, and it's love and insanity and a good deal of the animal mixed. Yes, you're right. It's between you and me, Bert,--but not to fight. One of us has got to leave--"

"It won't be me," Clayton quickly broke in. "I tell ye, I'd rather die, than leave."

For a full minute Ellis steadily returned the other man's fiery look, then went on as though there had been no interruption:

"--and the sooner we go the better. How do you want to settle it--shall we draw straws?"

"No, we'll not draw straws. Go ef you're afraid; but I won't stir a step. I came to warn ye, or to fight ye if y' wanted. Seein' y' won't--good-night."

Ellis stepped quickly in front of the door, and with the motion Clayton's hand went to his knife.

"Sit down, man," demanded Ellis, sternly. "We're not savages. Let's settle this matter in civilized fashion."

They confronted each other for a moment, the muscles of Clayton's face twitching an accompaniment to the nervous fingering of the buckhorn hilt; then he stepped up until they could have touched.

"What d' y' mean anyway?" he blazed. "Get out o' my road."

Ellis leaned against the door-bar without a word. The fire had burned down, and in the shadow his face had again the same expression of heaviness. The breathing of Clayton, swift and short, like one who struggles physically, painfully intensified the silence of that dimly lighted, log-bound room.

With his right hand Clayton drew his knife; he laid his left on the broad half-circle of wood that answered as a door handle.

"Open that door," he demanded huskily, "or by God, I'll stab ye!"

In the half-light the men faced each other, so near their breaths mingled. Twice Clayton tried to strike. The eyes of the other man held him powerless, and to save his life--even to satisfy a new, fierce hate--he could not stir. He stood a moment thus, then an animal-like frenzy, irresistible but impotent, seized him. He darted his head forward and spat in the heavy face so close to his own.

The unspeakable contempt of the insult shattered Bud Ellis's self-control. Prompted by blind fury, the great fist of the man shot out, hammer-like, and Clayton crumpled at his feet. It was a blow that would have felled the proverbial ox; it was the counterpart of many other blows, plus berserker rage, that had split pine boards for sheer joy in the ability to do so. These thoughts came sluggishly to the inflamed brain, and Ellis all at once dropped to his knees beside the limp, prostrate figure.

He bent over Clayton, he who had once been his friend. He was scarcely apprehensive at first, and he called his name brusquely; then, as grim conviction grew, his appeals became frantic.

At last Ellis shrank away from the Thing upon the floor. He stared until his eyeballs burnt like fire. It would never, while time lasted, move again.

Horror unutterable fell upon him.

II

In the year 1807 there were confined in a common Western jail, amid a swarm of wretches of every degree of baseness, two men as unlike as

storm and sunshine. One was charged with treason, the other with murder; conviction, in either case, meant death.

One was a man of middle age, an aristocrat born; a college graduate and a son of a college graduate; a man handsome of appearance, passionate and ambitious, who knew men's natures as he knew their names. He had fought bravely for his country, and his counsels had helped mould the foundations of the new republic. Honored by his fellow-men, he had served brilliantly in such exalted positions as that of United States Senator, and Attorney General for the State of New York. On one occasion, only a single vote stood between him and the presidency.

His name was Aaron Burr.

The other was a big backwoodsman of twenty, whose life had been as obscure as that of a domestic animal. He was rough of manner and slow of speech, and just now, owing to a combination of physical confinement and mental torture altogether unlovely in disposition.

This man was Bud Ellis.

The other prisoners--a motley lot of frontier reprobates--ate together, slept together, and quarrelled together. Looking constantly for trouble, and thrown into actual contact with an object as convenient as Aaron Burr, it was inevitable that he should be made the butt of their coarse gibes and foul witticisms; and when these could not penetrate his calm, superior self-possession, it was just as inevitable that taunts should extend even to worse indignities.

Burr was not the man to be stirred against his calm judgment; but one day his passionate nature broke loose, and he and the offender came to blows.

There were a dozen prisoners in the single ill-lighted, log-bound room, and almost to a man they attacked him. The fight would not have lasted long had not the inequality appealed to Ellis on the second.

Moreover, with him, the incident was to the moment opportune. If ever a man was in the mood for war, it was the big, square-jawed pioneer. He was reckless and desperate for the first time in his life, and he joined with Burr against the room, with the abandon of a madman.

For minutes they fought. Elbows and knees, fists and feet, teeth and tough-skulled heads; every hard spot and every sharp angle bored and jabbed at the crushing mass which swiftly closed them in. They struggled like cats against numbers, and held the wall until the sound of battle brought the negligent guard running, and the muzzle of a carbine peeped through the grating. Burr and Ellis came out with

scarce a rag and with many bruises, but with the new-born lust of battle hot within them. Ellis glowered at the enemy, and having of the two the more breath, fired the parting shot.

"How I'd like to take you fellows out, one at a time," he said.

From that day the two men were kept apart from the others, and the friendship grew. When Burr chose, neither man nor woman could resist him. He chose now and Ellis, by habit and by nature silent, told of his life and of his thoughts. It was a new tale to Burr, these dream products of a strong man, and of solitude; and so, listening, he forgot his own trouble. The hard look that had formed over his face in the three years past vanished, leaving him again the natural, fascinating man who had first taken the drawing-room of the rare old Jumel mansion by storm. It was genuine, this tale that Ellis told; it was strong, with the savor of Mother Nature and of wild things, and fascinating with the beauty of unconscious telling.

"And the girl?" asked Burr after Ellis finished a passionate account of the last year. Unintentionally, he touched flame to tinder.

"Don't ask me about her. I'm not fit. She was coming to see me, but I wouldn't let her. She's good and innocent; she never imagined we were not as strong as she, and it's killing her. There's no question what will happen to me; everything is against me, and I'll be convicted.

"No one understands--she can't herself; but she feels responsible for one of us, already, and will feel the same for me when it's over. Anyway, I'd never see her again. I feel different toward her now, and always would. I'd never live over again days like I have in the past year: days I hated a friend I'd known all my life--because we both loved the same woman. If the Almighty sent love of woman into the world to be bought at the price I paid, it's wrong, and He's made a mistake. It's contrary to Nature, because Nature is kind.

"Last summer I'd sit out of doors at night and watch the stars come out thick, like old friends, till I'd catch the mood and be content. The wind would blow up from the south, softly, like some one fanning me, and the frogs and crickets would sing even and sleepy, and I'd think of her and be as nearly happy as it was possible for me to be.

"Then, somehow, he'd drift into the picture, and it grated. I'd wonder why this love of woman, which ought to make one feel the best of everything there is in life; which ought to make one kinder and tenderer to every one, should make me hate him, my best friend. The night would be spoiled, and from then on the crickets would sing out of tune. I'd go to bed, where, instead of sleeping, I would try to find out, and couldn't.

"And at last, that night--and the end! Oh, it's horrible, horrible! I wish to God they'd try me quick, and end it. It makes me hate that girl to think she's the cause. And that makes me hate myself, for I know she's innocent. Oh, it's tangled--tangled--"

Of the trial which followed, the world knows. How Burr pleaded his own case, and of the brilliancy of the pleading, history makes record at length. 'T was said long before, when the name of Burr was proud on the Nation's tongue--years before that fatal morning on Weekawken Heights--that no judge could decide against him. Though reviled by half the nation, it would seem it were yet true.

Another trial followed; but of this history is silent, though Aaron Burr pleaded this case as well. It was a trial for manslaughter, and every circumstance, even the prisoner's word, declared guilt. To show that a person may be guilty in act, and at the same time, in reality, innocent, calls for a master mind--the mind of a Burr. To tell of passion, one must have felt passion, and of such Burr had known his full share. No lawyer for the defence was ever better prepared than Burr, and he did his best. In court he told the jury a tale of motive, of circumstance, and of primitive love, such as had never been heard in that county before; such that the twelve men, without leaving their seats, brought a verdict of "Not guilty."

"I can't thank you right," said the big man, with a catch in his voice, wringing Burr's hand.

"Don't try," interrupted Burr, quickly. "You did as much for me." And even Burr did not attempt to say any more just then.

III

The two men went East together, travelling days where now hours would suffice. Why Burr took the countryman home with him, knowing, as he did, the incongruity of such a step, he himself could not have told. It puzzled Ellis still more. He had intended going far away to some indefinite place; but this opportunity of being virtually thrust into the position where he most wished to be, was unusual; it was a reversal of all precedent; and so why demur?

[Illustration: The two men went East together.]

On the way, Burr told much of his life--probably more than he had told before in years. He knew that the sympathy of Ellis was sincere, and a disinterested motive was with him a new thing, a key to confidence.

A woman was at this time, and had been for years, foremost in Burr's

mind. He was going to see her now; beyond that his plans were dim. During a career of politics, there had crept into the man's life much that was hard and worldly; but this attachment was from ambition far apart--his most sacred thing.

She was a brilliant woman, this friend of Burr's; one whom many sought; but it was not this which influenced him. She had been his best friend, and had taken him into her own home during the darkest hour of his life, when condemnation was everywhere. Gossip had fluttered, but to no avail. Burr never forgot a friend, and in this case it was more than friendship: it was a genuine love that lasted; for years later, in his old age and hers as well, old Jumel mansion made gay at their wedding.

"What do you expect to do?" asked Burr of Ellis.

"Anything just now that will make me forget," answered the countryman, quickly. "So there's enough of it is all that I ask. I'm going to get a little more education first. Sometime I'll study law--that is, if I'm here 'sometime.' I've got to be where there's life and action. I'll never end by being common." He paused a moment, and on his face there formed the peculiar heavy look that had confronted Clayton; a mask that hid a determination, which nothing of earth could shake. He finished slowly: "I'll either be something, or nothing."

Biographers leave the impression that at this time Burr was devoid of prestige on earth. Politically, this is true; but respecting his standing with the legal fraternity, it is wholly false. He had influence, and he used it, securing the stranger a place in a New York office, where his risk depended only upon himself. More than this, he gave Ellis money.

"You can pay me any interest you wish," said he when the latter protested.

Ellis had been settled a week. One evening he sat in the back room of the city office, fighting the demon of homesickness with work, and the light of an open fire. It was late, and he had studied till Nature rebelled; now he sat in his own peculiar position, gazing into the glow, motionless and wide-eyed.

He started at a tap on the door, and the past came back in a rush.

"Come in," he called.

Burr entered, and closed the door carefully behind him. Ellis motioned to a chair.

"No, I won't sit down," said Burr. "I'm only going to stay a moment."

He came over to the blaze, looking down on the other man's head. Finally he laid a hand on Ellis's shoulder.

"Lonesome, eh?" he inquired.

The student nodded silent assent.

"So am I," said Burr, beginning to pace up and down the narrow room. "Do you know," he burst out at last, "this town is like hell to me. Every hand is against me. There's not one man here, beside you, whom I can trust. I can't stand it. I'm going to leave the country. Some day I'll come back; but now it's too much." There was the accumulated bitterness of months in his voice. "My God!" he interjected, "you'd think these people never did anything wrong in their lives." He stopped and laid his hand again on the other man's shoulder.

"But enough of this--I didn't come to make you more lonesome. I want you to meet my friends before I go. You'll go out with me to-morrow afternoon?"

There was silence for a moment.

"If you wish. You know what I am," said Ellis.

Burr's hand rested a moment longer.

"Good-night," he said simply.

Some eight or ten miles north of the beach, on the island of Manhattan, stood Jumel home; a fine, white house, surrounded by a splendid lawn and gardens. A generation had already passed since its erection, and the city was slowly creeping near. It was a stately specimen of Colonial domestic architecture, built on simple, restful lines, and distinguished by the noble columns of its Grecian front. Destined to be diminished, the grounds had already begun to shrink; but from its commanding position it had a view that was magnificent, overlooking as it did, the Hudson, the Harlem, the East River, the Sound, and upon every side, miles upon miles of undulating land.

On the way, and again upon the grounds, Burr related the history of the old landmark, telling much with the fascination of personal knowledge. The tale of the Morrises, of Washington and of Mary Philipse was yet upon his tongue, as he led Ellis through the broad pillared entrance, into the great hall.

Things moved swiftly, very swiftly and very dreamily, to the countryman in the next few hours. Nothing but the lack of ability prevented his vanishing at the sound of approaching skirts; nothing

but physical timidity prevented his answering the greeting of the hostess; nothing but conscious awkwardness prompted the crude bow that answered the courtesy of the girl with the small hands, and the dark eyes who accompanied her--the first courtesy from powdered maid of fashion that he had ever known. Her name, Mary Philipse, coming so soon after Burr's story, staggered him, and, open-mouthed, he stood looking at her. Remembrance came to Burr simultaneously, and he touched Ellis on the arm.

"Don't worry, my friend," he laughed; "she's not the one."

Ellis grew red to the ears.

"We'll leave you to Mary," said Burr retreating with a smile; "she'll tell you the rest--from where I left off."

The girl with the big brown eyes was still smiling in an amused sort of way, but Ellis showed no resentment. He knew that to her he was a strange animal--very new and very peculiar. He did not do as a lesser man would have done, pretend knowledge of things unknown, but looked the girl frankly in the eyes.

"Pardon me, but it was all rather sudden," he explained. The red had left his face now. "I've only known a few women--and they were not--of your class. This is Mr. Burr's joke, not mine."

The smile faded from the girl's face. She met him on his own ground, and they were friends.

"Don't take it that way," she protested, quickly. "I see, he's been telling you of Washington's Mary Philipse. It merely happens that my name is the same. I'm simply a friend visiting here. Can't I show you the house? It's rather interesting."

If Ellis was a novelty to the woman, she was equally so to him. Unconventionality reigned in that house, and they were together an hour. Never before in his life had Ellis learned so much, nor caught so many glimpses of things beyond, in an equal length of time. His idea of woman had been trite, a little vague. He had no ideal; he had simply accepted, without question, the one specimen he had known well.

In an uncertain sort of way he had thought of the sex as being invariably creatures of unquestioned virtue, but of mind somewhat defective; who were to be respected and protected, loved perhaps with the love animals know; but of such an one as this he had no conception.

Here was a woman, younger than he, whose unconscious familiarity with

things, which to him lay hidden in the dark land of ignorance, affected him like a stimulant. A woman who had read and travelled and thought and felt; whose mind met him even in the unhesitating confidence of knowledge--it is no wonder that he was in a dream. It turned his little world upside down: so brief a time had elapsed since he had cursed woman for bringing crime into his life, in the narrowness of his ignorance thinking them all alike. He was in the presence of a superior, and his own smallness came over him like a flood.

He mentally swore, then and there, with a tightening of his jaw that meant finality, that he would raise himself to her plane. The girl saw the look, and wondered at it.

That night, at parting, the eyes of the two met. A moment passed--and another, and neither spoke a word. Then a smile broke over the face of Mary Philipse, and it was answered on the face of the man. Equals had met equals. At last the girl held out her hand.

"Call again, please," she requested. "Good-night."

Years passed. Burr had gone and returned again, and Jumel mansion had waxed festive to honor his home-coming. Then he opened an office in the city, and drab-colored routine fell upon him--to remain.

Meanwhile Time had done much for Ellis--rather, it had allowed him to do much for himself. He had passed through all the stages of transition--confusion, homesickness, despondency; but incentive to do was ever with him.

At first he had worked to forget, and, in self-defence; but Nature had been kind, and with years memory touched him softly, as though it were the past of another.

Then a new incentive came to him: an incentive more potent than the former, and which grew so slowly he did not recognize it, until he met it unmistakably face to face. Again into his life and against his will had crept a woman, and this woman's name was Mary Philipse. He met her now on her own ground, but still, as of old, with honors even. She had changed little since he first saw her. As often as he called, he met the same frank smile, and the brown eyes still regarded him with the same old candid, unreserved interest.

Ellis was, as the town would have said, successful. He had risen from a man-of-all-work to the State bar, and an office of his own. He had passed the decisive line and his rise was simply a question of time. He was in a position where he could do as he chose. He appreciated that Mary Philipse was the incentive that had put him where he was. She appealed to the best there was in his nature. She caused him to do

better work, to think better thoughts. He unselfishly wished her the best there was of life. Just how much more he felt he did not know--at least this was sufficient.

He would ask her to marry him. It was not the mad, dazzling passion of which poets sing; but he was wiser than of yore. Of Mary he was uncertain. That he was not the only man who went often to old Jumel mansion he was well aware, and with the determination to learn certainties, there came a tenderer regard than he had yet known.

* * * * *

Jumel was gay that night. There would be few more such scenes, for the owner was no longer young; but of this the throng in brocade and broadcloth and powder, who filled the spacious mansion, were thoughtless. Everywhere was an atmosphere of welcome; from the steady light of lanterns festooned on facade and lawn, to the sparkle of countless candles within.

It was that night that Ellis drew Mary Philipse aside and told her the tale that grew passionate in the telling. Fortune was kind, for he told it to the soft accompaniment of wine glasses ringing, and the slow music of the stately minuet.

Mary Philipse heard him through without a word, an expression on her face he had never seen before. Then their eyes met in the same frank way they had hundreds of times before, and she gave him her answer.

"I've expected this, and I've tried to be ready; but I'm not. I can't say no, and I can't say yes. I wouldn't try to explain to any one else, but I think you'll understand. Forgive me if I analyze you a little, and don't interrupt, please."

She passed her hand over her face slowly, a shade wearily.

"There are times when I come near loving you: for what you are, not for what you are to me. You are natural, you're strong; but you lack something I feel to be necessary to make life completely happy--the ability to forget all and enjoy the moment. I have watched you for years. It has been so in the past, and will be so in the future. Other men who see me, men born to the plane, have the quality--call it butterfly if you will--to enjoy the 'now.' It appeals to me--I am of their manner born." Their eyes met and she finished slowly, "It's injustice to you, I know; but I can't answer--now."

They sat a moment side by side in silence. The dancers were moving more swiftly to the sound of the Virginia reel.

Ellis reached over and took her hand, then bent and touched it softly

with his lips.

"I will wait--and abide," he said.

THE FAMILY FRIEND

from: Project Gutenberg's Affinities and Other Stories, by Mary Roberts Rinehart

I

I've thought the thing over and over, and honestly I don't know where it went wrong. It began so well. I planned it out, and it went exactly as I'd expected up to a certain point. Then it blew up.

There's no argument about it, a girl has to look out for herself. The minute the family begin mixing in there's trouble.

The day after I came out mother and I had a real heart-to-heart talk. I'd been away for years at school, and in the summers we hadn't seen much of each other. She played golf all day and I had my tennis and my horse. And in the evenings there were always kid dances. So we really got acquainted that day.

She rustled into my room and gazed at what was left of my ball gown, spread out on the bed.

"It really went rather well last night," she said.

"Yes, mother," I replied.

"I've sent the best of the flowers to the hospital."

"Yes, mother."

"You had more flowers than Bessie Willing."

I shrugged my shoulders, and for some reason or other that irritated her.

"For heaven's sake, Kit," she said sharply, "I wish you'd show a little appreciation. Your father has spent a fortune on you, one way and another. The supper alone last night---But that's not what I came to talk about."

"No, mother?"

"No. Are you going to continue to waste your time on Henry Baring?"

"I rather enjoy playing round with him. That's all it amounts to."

"Not at all," said mother in her best manner. "It keeps the others away."

"As, for instance?" I asked politely.

She was getting on my nerves. I didn't mean to marry Henry, but I did mean to carry on my own campaign.

"You know very well that there are only three marriageable men in town. There are eleven débutantes. And--I don't care to be unkind, but at least four of them are--are----"

"I know," I said wearily--"better looking than I am. Go ahead."

"You're not at all ugly," mother put in hastily. "A great many people said nice things about you last night. The only thing I want to impress on you is that Madge will have to come out next year, and that you've been reared with expensive tastes."

"I've got brains. Most of the other eleven haven't."

"Brains are a liability, not an asset."

"That's an exploded idea, mother. The only times they are a liability is when they are ruined by too much family interest."

"That sounds impertinent," she said coldly.

"Not at all; it's good business. If I'm to put over anything worth while, I shall have to work along my own lines. I can't afford to have my style cramped."

She raised her eyebrows at that, for she hates slang. But she looked relieved too. When I think of how sure of myself I was that day I could rave!

"Then you're not going to waste any more time on Henry?"

"I think," I said reflectively, "that I'm going to use Henry quite a lot. But I don't intend to marry him."

Yes, that's what I said. I remember it perfectly well. I was putting a dab of scent behind my ears at the time. I feel that I shall never use the stuff again.

Well, mother went out quite cheered. It was the first real mother-and-daughter talk we'd had for a long time. When she had gone I went into my bathroom and locked the door and opened the windows and smoked two cigarettes, thinking things out.

The family is opposed to my smoking, and no one knows except mother's maid, who fixes my hair, and the gardener. When for the third time he had seen smoke coming out of my bathroom window, and had rushed upstairs

with a fire grenade and all the servants at his heels, I was compelled to take him into my confidence.

Well, I smoked and thought things out. I am not beautiful, but I'm extremely _chic_, and at night, with a touch of rouge, I do very well. I have always worn sophisticated clothes. I thought they suited my style. But so did all the others. If I was to do anything distinguished it would have to be on new lines.

"Early Victorian?" I said to myself.

But the idea of me Lydia-languishing, prunes-and-priseming round the place was too much.

Athletics? Well, they were not bad. There's a lot of chance in golf, although tennis is blowzy. I look well in sport clothes too. But if a girl is a dub at a game a man is apt to tell her so, and I know my own disposition. If he criticised me, before I knew it I'd be swatting my prey with a mashie or a niblick, and everything over. Three men, mother had said. I knew who they were. They had all sent me flowers and danced with me, without saying a word, and then taken me back to mother and rushed for the particular married woman they were interested in.

Oh, I'm not blind! All the men I knew, old enough to amount to anything, were interested in some married woman. I drive my own car, and I used to meet them on lonely back roads, Lillian Marshall and Tom Connor, Toots Warrington and Russell Hill, and the rest of them.

I ask you, what chance had a débutante among them? There were two things to decide that afternoon, the man and the method. I was out now. The family had agreed to let me alone. I had a year before me, until Madge came out. And I knew I could count on Henry Baring to help me all he could. He was a sort of family friend. When he couldn't get me he would take Madge to kid picnics, and mother used to call on him to make a fourth at bridge or fill in at a dinner. You know the sort.

He worked at something or other, and made enough to keep him and pay his club bills, and to let him send flowers to débutantes, and to set up an occasional little supper to pay his way socially. But nobody ever thought of marrying him. He was tall and red-headed and not very handsome. Have I said that?

So I counted on Henry. It makes me bitter even to write it. His very looks were solid and dependable, although I underestimated his hair. I've said I had brains. Well, I had too many brains. Mother was right--the world doesn't come to the clever folks, it comes to the stubborn, obstinate, one-idea-at-a-time people.

I'm going to tell this thing, because a lot of people are saying I threw

away a good thing, and mother----

I have a certain amount of superstition in me. I remember, when I was about to be confirmed at school, I was told to open the Bible at random and take the first verse my eyes fell on for a sort of motto through life. Mine was to the effect that as a partridge sits on eggs and fails to hatch them, so too the person who gets riches without deserving them. It rather bothered me at the time. Well, it never will again.

So I took three cigarettes and marked each one with the initials of an eligible. Then I shook them up in a box and drew Russell Hill. I knew then that I had my work cut out for me. Even with Henry's help it was going to be a hard pull. Russell Hill was spoiled. Probably out of the other eleven at least nine had Russell in the backs of their heads. And he knew every move of the game. They'd all been tried on him--golf and moonlight and 1830 methods and pro and anti suffrage and amateur theatricals and ingénue technique and the come-hither glance. So far they had all failed.

The girls were coming in for tea and to talk things over, and as I dressed I was thinking hard. Mother had gone out for a golf lesson, so I sent the rest of my cigarettes down to the drawing room and picked up a book. I remember only one line of that book. Believe me, as a matrimonial text it had the partridge one going. The girl in the story had been crazy about a man.

"I always had my hand in his coat pocket!" she said.

Don't misunderstand, she was not robbing him. She slipped her hand into his coat pocket to let him know how fond she was of him. And after a moment, she said, he always put his hand in, too, over hers. And he ended her slave. He was a very sophisticated man, up to every move of the game, and he ended her slave!

But Russell would take tact. A man likes to be adored, but he hates to look foolish. The first thing was, of course, to get his attention. I was only one of a dozen. True, he had sent me flowers, but he probably did what all the others did--had a standing order and a box of his cards at the florist's. I wasn't fooled for a minute. To him I was a flapper, nothing else. Whether flapper is a term of reproach or one of tribute depends on whether the girl is a débutante or in the first line of the chorus of a musical show. Oh, I wasn't very old, but I knew my way about.

Margaret North came first and the rest trailed in soon after. Everybody talked about the ball, and said it had been wonderful, and I sat there and sized them up. I had a fight on my hands, and I knew it.

There was a picture of Madge sitting round, and Margaret North picked it

up and took it to the light. Margaret is one of the four mother had so delicately referred to.

"You'll have to hurry, Kit," she said. "Sister's a raving beauty."

"Oh, I don't know," I observed casually. "Beauty's not everything. The girl in the book had not been a beauty."

"It's all there is," said Margaret. "Figure doesn't count any more. Anybody can have a figure who has a decent dressmaker."

"How about brains?" I asked.

There was a squeal at that.

"Cut 'em out," said Ellie Clavering. "Hide 'em. Disguise 'em. Brains are--are clandestine."

"Anyhow," somebody put in, "Kit isn't worrying; she's got Henry."

That's how they'd fixed me. I knew what it meant. It was a cheap game, but they were playing it. They were going to tie me to Henry. They would ask us together, and put us together at dinners, and talk about us together. In the end everybody would think of us together. I'd seen it done before. It's ruined more débutantes than anything else. They'd put me out of the running before I'd started.

I sat back with my cup of tea and listened, and it made me positively ill. It wasn't that they were clever. They were just instinctive. I could have screamed. And having disposed of me, having handcuffed me to Henry Baring and lost the key, so to speak, they went on to the real subject, which was Russell.

Mother had said there were three eligibles. But to those little idiots round the tea table there was only one. They'd been friendly enough as long as Henry and I were on the rack. But the moment Russell's name was mentioned there was a difference. They didn't talk so much and they eyed each other more. Ella Clavering put both lemon and cream in her tea, and drank it without noticing. Somebody said very impressively that she understood the affair with Toots was off, and that Russell had said, according to report, that he was glad of it. He'd have a little time to himself now.

"That means, I dare say," I said languidly, "that Russell is ready to bring his warmed-over affections to some of us!"

There was a sort of electric silence for a minute.

"It will take a very sophisticated person to land Russell after Toots,"

I went on. "He's past the ingénue stage."

"If a girl is pretty she always has a chance with Russell." Margaret, of course. She was standing in front of a mirror and I had my eyes on her. Evidently what I had said made an impression, for she cocked her hat down an inch more over her right eye and watched to see the effect.

"You ought to wear earrings, dear," I said. "You need just that dash of _chic_."

Just for a moment I could see in every eye a sort of vision of Toots Warrington, with the large pearls she always wore in her ears--Toots, who had had Russell tame-cattin' for her off and on for years!

Oh, they fell for it all right! I poured myself another cup of tea to hide the triumph in my face. Little idiots! If he was sick of Toots he'd hate everything that reminded him of her. I could see the crowd of them swaggering in at the next party, in their best imitation of Toots Warrington, with eyes slightly narrowed, and earrings. And I could see Russell's soul turn over in revolt and go out and take a walk. I knew a lot about men even then, but not enough. I know more now.

II

That night Henry Baring came to call. Being a sort of family friend he had a way of walking in unexpectedly, with a box of candy for whoever saw him first. If mother and I were out, he played chess with father. If there was no one in, he was quite likely to range round the lower floor, and ask the butler about his family, and maybe read for an hour or so in the library. The servants adored him, but he was matrimonially impossible.

That night he came. I was at home alone.

"You will take two full days' rest after your ball," mother had said. "I have seen enough débutantes looking ready for the hospital the first week they came out."

So I was alone that evening, and mother and father had gone to a dinner. I was sulky, I don't mind saying. At six o'clock a box of flowers had come, but they were only from Henry and not exciting. "Thought I'd send them to-day," he wrote on his card. "Didn't like the idea of my personal offering nailed to the club wall."

About nine o'clock I put on my silk dressing gown and went down to the library for the book about the girl who always had her hand in the man's coat pocket. I had got clear in when I saw Henry's red head over the top of a deep chair.

"Come in!" he called. "I was told there was no one at home, but methinks I know the step and the rustle."

"Don't look round," I said sharply. "I'm not dressed."

"Can't you stay a few minutes?"

"Certainly not."

"If I don't look?"

Well, it seemed silly to run. I was more covered up than I'd been the night before in my ball gown. Besides, it had occurred to me that Henry could be useful if he would. A sort of plan had popped into my head. Inspiration, I called it then.

"Pretty nice last night, wasn't it?" he asked, talking to the fireplace. "You looked some person, Kit, believe me."

"Considering that I've spent nineteen years getting ready, it should have gone off rather well."

"I suppose I'll never see you any more."

"This looks like it! Why?"

"You'll be so popular."

"Oh, that! I'm not sure, Henry. I'm not beautiful."

He jumped at that, and almost turned round.

"Not beautiful!" he said. "You're--you're the loveliest thing that ever lived, and you know it."

It began to look to me as if he wouldn't help after all. There was a sort of huskiness in his voice, a--Oh, well, you know. I began on the plan, however.

"You'll see me, all right," I said. "I'll have other friends, of course. I hope so anyhow. But when one thinks who and what they are----"

"Good gracious, Kit! What are you driving at?"

"I'm young," I said. "I know that. But I'm not ignorant. And a really nice girl with ideals----"

"I'll have to get up," he said suddenly. "I'll stand with my back to

you, if you insist, but I'll have to get up. What's all this about ideals?"

"You know very well," I put in with dignity. "If every time I meet a nice man people come to me with stories about him, or mother and father warn me against him, what am I to do?"

"Can't you stand behind a chair and let me face you? This is serious."

"Oh, turn round," I said recklessly. "If I hear any one coming I can run. Anyhow, it may be unconventional but I'm fully clothed."

"Are you being warned against me?" he threw at me like a bomb. "Because, if--if you are, it's absurd nonsense. I'm no saint, and I'd never be fit for you to--What silly story have you heard, Kit?"

He was quite white, and his red hair looked like a conflagration.

"It's not about you at all; it's about Russell Hill."

It took him a moment to breathe normally again.

"Oh--Russell!" he said. "Well, that's probably nonsense too. You don't mean to say your people object to your knowing Russell?"

"Not quite that," I said. "But I can't have him here, or go round with him, or anything of that sort."

"Do they venture to give a reason?"

"Toots Warrington."

It's queer about men, the way they stand up for each other. Henry knew as well as he knew anything that most of the girls we both knew were crazy about Russell. And if he cared for me--and the way he acted made me suspicious--he had a good chance to throw Russell into the discard that night. But he didn't. I knew well enough he wouldn't.

"That's perfect idiocy," he said sternly. "Society is organised along certain lines, and maybe if you and I had anything to do with it we'd change things. But there is no commandment or social law or anything else against a man having a married woman for a friend."

"Friend!"

"Exactly--friend."

"I don't care to have anything to do with him."

"You needn't, of course. But you owe it to Russell to give him a chance to set things straight. Any how he and Mrs. Warrington are not seeing each other much any more. It's off."

"The very fact that you say it is 'off' shows that it was once 'on.'"

He waved his hands in perfect despair. If I'd rehearsed him he couldn't have picked up his cues any better.

"I'm going to tell him," he said. "It's ridiculous. It's--it's libellous."

"I don't want him coming here explaining. I am not even interested."

"You're a perfect child, a stubborn child! Your mind's in pigtails, like your hair."

Yes, my hair was down. I have rather nice hair.

"If he comes here," I said with my eyes wide, "he will have to come when mother and father are out."

"I'll bring him," said Henry valiantly. "I'm not going to see him calumniated, that's all." Then something struck his sense of humour and he chuckled. "It will be a new and valuable experience to him," he said, "to have to come clandestinely. Do him good!"

I went upstairs then. It had been a fair day's work.

But it's hard to count on a family. Mother sprained her ankle getting out of the car that night and was laid up for three days. I chafed at first. Henry might change his mind or one of the eleven get in some fine work. We declined everything that week, and I made some experiments with my hair and the aid of mother's maid. I wanted a sort of awfully feminine method--not sappy but not at all sophisticated. Toots Warrington is always waved and netted, and all the girls by that time had got earrings and were going round waved and netted too.

I wanted to fix my hair like a girl who slips her hand into a man's coat pocket because she can't help it, and then tries to get it out, and can't because his hand has got hold of it.

Then one night I got it. Henry had dropped in, and found mother with her foot up and the look of a dyspeptic martyr on her face, and father with a cold and a thermometer in his mouth.

"I've come to take Kit to the movies," he announced calmly. "Far be it from me not to contribute to the entertainment of a young lady who is just out!"

"Full of gerbs!" father grunted, referring to the movies of course, not me. But mother agreed.

"Do take her out, Henry," she said. "She's been on my nerves all evening."

So we went, and there was a girl in one of the pictures who had exactly the right hair arrangement. She had it loose and wavy about her face, and it blew about the way things do blow in the movies, and in the back it was a sort of soft wad.

It shows the association of ideas that I found my hand in Henry's coat pocket, and he grabbed it like a lunatic.

"You darling!" he said thickly. "Don't do that unless you mean it. I can't stand it."

I had to be very cool on the way home in the motor or he would have kissed me.

Mother and I went to a reception on the following Tuesday, and I wondered if mother noticed. She did. Coming home in the motor she turned and stared at me.

"Thank heaven, Kit," she said, "you still look like a young girl. All at once Ellie and the others look like married women. Earrings! It's absurd. And such earrings! I am quite sure," she went on, eying me, "that some of them had been smoking. I got an unmistakable whiff of it when I was talking with Bessie Willing."

Well, I had rinsed my mouth with mouth wash and dabbed my lips with cologne, so she got nothing from me. But I tasted like a drug store.

I am not smoking now. I am not doing much of anything. I--but I'm coming to that.

I'm no hypocrite. I'd been raised for one purpose, and that was to marry well. If I did it in my own way, and you think my way not exactly ethical, I can't help it. This thing of sitting back and letting somebody find you and propose to you is ridiculous. There is only one life, and we have to make the best we can of it.

Ethical! Don't girls always have the worst of it anyhow? They can't go and ask the man. They have to lie in wait and plan and scheme, or get left and have their younger sisters come out and crowd them, and at twenty-five or so begin to regard any man at all as a prospect. Maybe my methods sound a bit crude, but compared with the average girl I know, I was delicate. I didn't play up my attractions, at least not more than

was necessary. I was using my mind, not my body.

III

On Tuesday night I was going to a dance. Mother and father were dining out and were to meet me later, so I was free until ten o'clock. That night Henry brought Russell Hill.

I kept them waiting a few minutes, and came down ready for the car. At the last minute I pulled my hair a bit loose over my face, and the effect was exactly right.

Henry was horribly uncomfortable, and left in a few minutes. He was going with some people to the dance, and would see us later. About all he said was with his usual tact.

"You two ought to get together," he said. "There's a lot too much being whispered these days, and not enough talking out loud."

With that he went, and we two were left facing each other.

"This is one of Henry's inspirations, Miss Katherine," Russell said.

"I--I don't usually have to wait until the family is out before I make a call."

"Families are queer," I said non-committally. There was a window open and I stood near it, under a pink lamp, and let my hair blow about.

"Are we going to sit down, or am I to be banished as soon as I've explained that I am a safe companion for a débutante?"

He was plainly laughing at me, although he was uncomfortable too. And I have some spirit left.

"I am afraid you are giving me credit for too much interest," I said.

"This is Henry's idea, you know. You needn't defend yourself to me. You look--entirely safe."

He hated that. No man likes to look entirely safe. He put his hands in his pockets and half closed his eyes.

"Humph!" he said. "Then I gather that this whole meeting is a mistake. I'm respectable enough to be uninteresting, and the ban your people have placed on me doesn't particularly concern you!"

"That's not quite true," I said slowly. "I--if I ever got a chance to know you really well, I'm sure we'd be--but I'll never get a chance, you know."

"Upon my word," he broke out, "I'd like to know just what your people have heard! But that doesn't matter. What really matters"--he had hardly taken his eyes off me--"what really matters is that I am going to see you again. Often!"

"It's impossible."

"Rot! We're always going to the same places. Am I absolutely warned off?"

"You're not. But I am."

He began to walk up and down the room. Half an hour before he had never given me a thought. Henry, I knew, had lugged him there by sheer force and a misplaced sense of justice. And now he was pacing about in a rage!

He stopped rather near me.

"If it's Mrs. Warrington all the fuss is about, it's imbecile," he said. "In the first place, there never was anything to it. In the second place, it's all over anyhow."

"I don't know what the fuss is about."

"You know the whole thing. Don't pretend you don't. You've got the face of a little saint, with all that fluffy hair, but your eyes don't belong to the rest, young lady. Are you going to dance with me to-night?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Well, you'll give me a little time, won't you? I suppose we can sit in a closet and talk, or hide on a veranda."

"It's--it's rather sneaking, isn't it?"

"That doesn't hurt it any for me."

So I promised, and, the car being announced, he put my wrap round my shoulders.

"Stunning hair you've got," he said from behind me. "Thank heaven for hair that isn't marceled and glued up in a net!"

I held out my hand in the hall, and he took it.

"I'm not such a bad lot after all, am I?" he demanded.

With my best spontaneous gesture I put my free hand over his as it held

mine.

"I'm so sorry, so terribly sorry, if I've misunderstood," I said earnestly.

Wallace had gone to the outer door. Russell Hill stooped over and kissed my hand.

Well, it was working. An hour before I was one of what I'd heard he had called "the dolly dozen." Now, by merely letting him understand that he couldn't have what he'd never wanted, he was eager.

We sat out one dance under the stairs, and an intermission in a pantry while the musicians who had been stationed there were getting their supper. He tried to hold my hand and I drew it away--not too fast, but so he could understand the struggle I was having between duty and inclination. And we talked about love.

I said I liked to play round with men and have a good time and all that sort of thing, but that I thought I was naturally cold.

"You cold?" he said. "It's only that the right man has not come along."

"I've known a good many. A good many have--have----"

"Cared for you? Of course. They're not fools or blind. Look here, I'm going to ring you up now and then."

"I think you'd better not."

"If I'm not to see you and not to telephone, how's this friendship of ours to get on?"

"People who are real friends don't need to see each other."

"That's the first real *débutante* speech you've made to-night. Now, see here, I'm going to see you again, and often. And I'm going to ring you up. What's your tailor's name?"

I told him, and he put it down on his dance card.

"All right," he said. "Herschenrother is now my middle name, and if it's not convenient to talk, you can give me the high sign."

Toots Warrington came along just then with an army officer she'd taken on. They got clear round the palms and into the pantry before they saw us, and her face was funny.

Mother and I had another heart-to-heart talk that night on the way home.

Father had gone a couple of hours earlier and we had the car to ourselves. Mother was tired and irritable.

"It seemed to me, Kit," she observed, "that you danced with every hopeless ineligible there. You danced three times with Henry."

"For heaven's sake, mother," I snapped, "let poor Henry alone. Henry is the most useful person I know."

"You can't play with red-headed people and not get burned," mother said with unconscious humour. "He's very fond of you, Kit. I watched him to-night."

"The fonder the better," I said flippantly. Yes, that's what I said. When I look back on that evening and think how little Henry entered into my plans, and the rest of it, it makes me cold.

"I want you to do one thing--just one, mother: I want you to be very cool to Russell Hill."

"Cool!"

"And I want you to forbid me to see him."

"I'm not insane, Katherine."

"Listen, mother," I said desperately. "All his life Russell Hill has had everything he wanted. He's had so much that--that he's got a sort of social indigestion. The only things he wants now are the things he can't have. So he can't have me."

Mother's not very subtle. And she was alarmed. I can still see her trying to readjust her ideas, and getting tied up in them, and coming a mental cropper, so to speak.

"If he can't have me he'll want me."

"I'm not sure of it. He----"

"Mother," I said in despair, "you've been married for twenty years, and you know less about men in a month than I do in a minute. Please forbid him the house--not in so many words, but act it."

"Why?" she said feebly.

"Anything you can think of--Toots Warrington will do."

She got out her salts and held them to her nose.

"I feel as though I'm losing my mind," she said at last. "But if you're set on it----"

That was all until we got home. Then on the stairs I thought of something.

"Oh, yes," I said. "No matter what I am doing, mother, if Herschenrother the tailor calls up I want to go to the telephone."

I can still see her staring after me with her mouth open as I went up the stairs.

Herschenrother called me up the next morning, and asked me how I was, and how the dragons were, and if there was any chance of my walking in the park at five o'clock. I said there was, and called up Henry and asked him to walk with me.

"I should say so," he said. "You've only got to ask me, Kit. I'm always ready to hang round."

There was rather a bad half hour in the park, and for a time I felt that Henry had been a wrong move. But, as it turned out he hadn't, for Russell took advantage of somebody's signalling to Henry from a machine to say:

"Just a bit afraid of me still, aren't you?"

"Why?"

"You brought Henry. I know the signs. You asked him, and he's so set up about it that he's walking on clouds."

"I am afraid."

"Of me?"

"Of myself."

He caught my arm as he helped me across a puddle, and squeezed it.

"Good girl!" he said.

And later on, when Henry was called again--he's terribly popular, Henry is--he had another chance.

"I'm going to see you alone if I have to steal you," he said.

Herschenrother called up again the next day, and Madge, who had come home for the Christmas holidays, called me.

"Gee, Kit," she said, "you must be getting a trousseau. That tailor's always on the phone."

I went.

"Hello," said Russell's voice, "how about that fitting?"

"I don't know. I'm horribly busy to-day."

"It's very important. I--I can't go ahead without it."

"Oh, all right," I said. Madge was listening and I had to be careful. "I must have the suit."

"You can have anything I've got. How about the Art Gallery? Art is long and time is fleeting. Nobody goes there."

"Very well, four o'clock," I replied, and rang off.

"Rather a nice voice," Madge said, eying me. "Think I'll go along, Kit. I've been shut up in school until the mere thought of even a good-looking tailor makes me thrill."

She was so insistent that I had to go to mother finally, and mother told her she would have to practise. She was furious. Really, mother turned out to be a most understanding person. I got to be quite fond of her. We had a chat that afternoon that brought us closer together than ever.

"Things are doing pretty well, mother," I said when she'd finished Madge.

"He must be interested when he would take that absurd name."

"And the Art Gallery! I dare say he has never voluntarily been inside of one in his life."

"Kit," mother said, "what about your father?"

"Haven't you told him?"

"No; he wouldn't understand."

Of course not. I knew men well enough for that. They believe that life and marriage arrange themselves. That it's all a sort of combination of Providence and chance. Predestination plus opportunity!

"Can't you tell him you've heard something about Russell, and that he'd better be cool to him?"

"And have him turn the man down if it really comes to a proposal!"

"That won't matter," I told her. "We'll probably elope anyhow."

Mother opposed that vigorously. She said that no matter how good a match it was, there was always something queer about an elopement. And anyhow she'd been giving wedding gifts for years and it was time something came in instead of going out. It was the only point we differed on.

Well, father did his best to queer things that very day. All the way through I played in hard luck. Just when things were going right something happened.

I met Russell at the Art Gallery. It was a cold day, but I left my muff at home. It was about time for the coat-pocket business. I couldn't afford to wait, for one or two of the girls were wearing their hair like mine, and I'd heard that Toots Warrington had gone to Russell and asked him how he liked kindergartening. Bessie Willing, who told me, said that Russell's reply was:

"It's rather pleasant. I'm reversing things. Instead of going from the cradle to the grave, I'm going from the grave to the cradle."

I don't believe he said it. In the first place, he is too polite. In the second place, he is too stupid. But as Toots is not young he may have thought of it.

He was waiting near a heater, and we sat down together. I shivered.

"Cold, honey?" he asked.

"Hands are cold. Do you mind if I put one in your coat pocket?"

Did he mind? He did not. He was very polite at first and emptied the pocket of various things, including a letter which he mentioned casually was a bill. But after a moment he slid his hand in on top of mine.

"You're a wonderful young person," he said, "and you've got me going."

Then he squeezed the hand until it hurt. Suddenly he looked up.

"Great Scott!" he said. "There's Henry!"

Of course it was Henry. He had brought a catalogue and was going painstakingly from one picture to another. He did not see us at first, and we had time to stand up and be looking at a landscape when he got to us. He looked moderately surprised and waited to mark something in the catalogue before he joined us.

"Bully show, isn't it?" he said cheerfully. "Never saw so many good 'uns. Well, what are you children up to?"

"Dropped in to get warm," said Russell. And I was going to add something, but Henry's interest in us had passed evidently. He marked another cross in the catalogue and went on, with the light shining on his red hair and his soul clearly as uplifted as his chin.

"You needn't worry about Henry," I said. "He's a friend of the family, and I'll just call him up and tell him not to say anything."

"I used to think he was fond of you."

"That's all over," I said casually. "It was just one of the things that comes and goes. Like this little--acquaintance of ours."

"What do you mean, goes?" he demanded almost fiercely.

"They always do, don't they? Awfully pleasant things don't last. And we can't go on meeting indefinitely. Some one will tell father, and then where will I be?"

That was a wrong move about father.

"That reminds me," he said. "Are you sure your father dislikes me such a lot?"

"Don't let's talk about it," I said, and closed my eyes.

"Because I met him to-day, and he nearly fell on my neck and hugged me."

Can you beat that? I was stunned.

"The more he detests people," I managed finally, "the more polite he is."

Then I took off my gloves and fell to rubbing the fingers of my left hand. And he moved round and put it in the other coat pocket without a word, with his hand over it, and the danger was past, for the time anyhow.

Mother came round that evening about the elopement.

"Perhaps you are right, Katherine," she said. "A lot of people will send things when the announcement cards go out. And Russell can afford to buy you anything you want anyhow."

Madge was a nuisance all that week. She was always at the telephone

first when it rang, and I did not like her tone when she said it was Herschenrother again. Once I could have sworn that I saw her following me, but she ducked into a shop when I turned round.

She had transferred her affections to Henry, and he took her to a cotillon or two for the school set, and played round with the youngsters generally, and showed her a sweet time, as she said.

But once when mother and I had been shut in my room, going over my clothes and making notes of what I would take with me, if the thing came to an elopement--I was pretty sure by that time, and we planned a sort of week-end outfit without riding things--I opened the door suddenly, and Madge was just outside.

Well, we got her back to school finally, and Henry took her to the train. I remember mother's watching them as they got into the car together.

"That wouldn't be so bad for Madge," she said reflectively. "She is bound to marry badly anyhow, she's so impulsive, and Henry would be a good counterweight. He is very dependable."

"She would make him most unhappy," I said. "Probably Henry would be all right for Madge, but how about Madge for Henry?"

Mother looked at me and said nothing.

Russell proposed at the end of the next week, and I refused. He proposed in a movie. We'd had to give up the Art Gallery because Henry was always taking people through it. He took Toots one afternoon, and that finished us.

There was a little talk that Henry and Toots were getting rather thick. The army man's leave was up, and she had to have somebody. There was probably something to it. We saw them in the park one afternoon sitting on a bench, and I could have sworn she had her hand in his coat pocket!

Well, I refused Russell.

"Why?" he said. "You're crazy about me, and you know it."

"I'm not going to marry a past," I said. "You'd make me horribly unhappy."

"I'd never bore you, that's one thing."

"No, but you might find me dull."

"Dull! Darling girl, I've never had as interesting a month in my life."

I said nothing. After a minute:

"Do you remember the first night we really met?"

"In the pantry. Yes."

"Do you remember what you said about being cold? And I told you it was a question of the right man?"

I remembered.

"Well, I'm the man," he said triumphantly. "Don't fool yourself--that little hand of yours slips into my coat pocket as if it belonged there. And it does."

He pulled it out and kissed it. Luckily the theatre was dark.

Two days later I consented to elope with him. Mother was quite delirious when I told her. She came over and kissed my cheek.

"You've never disappointed me, Kit, never," she said. "If only Madge would do as well."

She sighed.

"Madge will probably marry for love, and be happy," I snapped. It was a silly speech. I haven't an idea why I made it.

"And shabby," said mother.

I turned on her sharply. The strain of the last month was over, and I dare say I went to pieces.

"It's all very well for you to be satisfied," I cried. "You're not going to marry Russell Hill, and have him call you 'girlie,' and see his hat move every time he raises his eyebrows. I am."

She went out very stiffly, and sent her maid in with hot tea.

I was out at a theatre party that night, and mother was in my room when I got back.

"I want to talk to you, Katherine," she said, "I've been uneasy all evening."

"If you mean about what I said this afternoon, please forget it, mother. I was tired and nervous. I didn't mean it."

"Not that. I don't want any mistake about this elopement. Now and then those things have a way of going wrong. Quite often there is trouble about a license or a minister."

"Send father ahead," I said flippantly.

"Not father. But some one really ought to look after things. Russell is not the sort to arrange anything in advance. I thought perhaps Henry--"

"Henry!"

"He is reliable," said mother. "And he has your well-being at heart. He is more like a brother than a good many brothers I know."

I could scream my head off when I think of it now. For we fixed on Henry, and I telephoned him to come round to dinner. He seemed rather surprised when he heard my voice.

"Honestly, Kit," he said, "do you want me?"

"I want you to do something for me."

"Then I'll come. That's all that's necessary."

But it wasn't as easy as it had promised after all. There's something so downright about Henry. He was standing in front of the library fire after dinner when I told him.

"Henry," I said, "I am going to be married."

He did not say anything at first. Then:

"Well?" he asked.

"Do you know to whom?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you going to say anything?"

"I don't know what I can say," he said very slowly and carefully. "If each of you cares a lot, that's all there is to it, isn't it? The point is, of course, why you are doing it. If it's to cut out somebody else, or to get money or anything like that, I'm not going to wish you happiness, because you won't deserve it. If you're in love with him, that's different."

Did you ever try to tell a lie to a red-headed young man with blue eyes? It's extremely difficult.

"I'm not in love with him, Henry," I said. I was astounded to hear myself saying it.

"Then you're giving him a crooked deal."

"He's not in love with me either. So that's even."

"Then why----"

"Because he thinks he can't have me," I said. "I'm marrying him because he's the most marriageable man I know, and I have to marry money. I've been raised for that. And he's marrying me because I'm the only girl whose people didn't fling her at him."

"Then I wish you joy of each other!" he said hoarsely, and slammed out of the room and out of the house.

I haven't the faintest idea what came over me that night. I went upstairs and cried my eyes out.

A few days later, after a round of luncheons, dinners and dances until I was half dead, I had a free evening. The elopement had been set for Friday, and it was Wednesday. Mother and father were out, and I went downstairs for a book. I had got it and was just going out when I saw Henry's red head over the back of the leather chair by the fire.

I went over. He was not reading. He was just sitting, his long legs stretched out in front of him.

"Hello, Kit," he said calmly. "I knew this was an off night. Sit down."

I sat down, rather suspicious of his manner. Henry can't dissemble.

"About the other night," he said, "I was taken by surprise. Just forget it, Kit. Now, when are you going to pull this thing off?"

I told him, and where.

"Russell made any arrangements?"

"I haven't asked."

"Probably not. He'll expect to get out of the train and find a license and a preacher on the platform. I'd better be best man, and go down there a day before to fix things."

Well, it wasn't flattering to see him so eager to get me married. There had been a time when I thought--However--

"Oh!" I said.

"Better do it right while you're about it," he said. "You might give me one of your rings, and I'll order a wedding ring. Platinum or gold?"

"Platinum," I said feebly.

"Anything inside?"

"The--the date, I suppose."

"No initials or anything like that?"

I roused from a sort of stupor of astonishment.

"I like a very narrow ring," I said. "There won't be room for much inside. The date will do. But I'm sure that Russell----"

"All right if he does. Perhaps I'd better not put in the date. Then, if he takes one along, I can return this and have it credited to him."

"You're very thoughtful."

"Not at all," he said with the first atom of feeling he'd shown. "I don't approve of anything about this business; but if it's going to happen, it's going to happen right!"

He got up and stood in front of the fire.

"The thing to be sure of, Kit," he said soberly, "is that you don't love any one else. It's bad enough as it is, but that would be worse."

"I wouldn't dare to be in love with any one who wasn't eligible," I said, not looking at him. "I've been raised for just what I'm doing. I'm fulfilling my destiny."

"There's nobody else, then?"

"Who could there be?"

"That's twice I've asked you a perfectly simple question, Kit, and you have evaded it. The plain truth, of course, is that you are in love, absolutely single-heartedly in love, but not with Russell."

"Then who?" I demanded sharply.

"With yourself," he said, and picked up his hat and went out.

IV

Russell and I eloped on a Friday morning. Mother and I packed my dressing case and a bag, and I gave her an itemized list of what was to be sent on in my trunk when I wired for it. She was greatly relieved to know that Henry was looking after things, especially the ring.

"I do hope he gets a narrow one," she said. "Wedding rings are nonsense at any time. You can never wear other rings with them. But if it is platinum you can have it set with diamonds later on."

I think she was disappointed when I refused to leave a note on my dressing table for her.

"That's out of date, mother," I said. "You needn't know anything until you get my wire that it's over. Then you can call up the newspapers and deny it. That's the best way to let them know."

Then she went out, per agreement, after kissing me good-by, and I called a taxicab and eloped.

Did you ever have a day when things went wrong with you and when you knew that the fault was somewhere in you? Well, that was that sort of day. The minute I was in the taxicab I was uncomfortable. All at once I didn't want to be married. I hoped Russell would miss the train, and I could go back home and be a spinster lady and be on committees.

But he did not miss the train. He was there, waiting. He had on a very ugly necktie and an English ulster that made his chest dish in, although he has a good figure.

"Hello, girly," he said. "Stuff all here? Any excitement at home? No? Nice work."

My lips felt stiff.

"Train's waiting," he said. "What do you think of Henry? Big lift, that is. I've never been married before. I'm fairly twittering."

We got into the train. There was no Pullman. Not that it mattered, but it helped to upset me. I hated eloping in a day coach. And a woman with a market basket sat across the aisle, and the legs of a chicken stuck out.

Russell squeezed into the seat beside me.

"Jove, this is great!" he said. "Aren't you going to put your hand in my coat pocket, honey?"

Quite suddenly I said:

"I don't want to."

He drew away a trifle.

"You're nervous," he said. "So am I, for that matter. D'you mind if I go and smoke?"

I didn't mind. I thought if I had to see that ulster dishing in and that tie another minute I'd go crazy.

I grew calmer when he had gone. Here was the thing I had worked so hard for, mine at last. I thought of Toots, and her face when she saw the papers. I thought of Ellie Clavering and Bessie Willing and Margaret North and the others, with their earrings and the imitation of Toots and all the rest of it. I felt rather better. When Russell came back I could even smile at him.

"I wish I could have a cigarette," I said.

He turned and put a hand over mine.

"You're going to cut that out, you know, girlie," he said. "I can't have my wife smoking."

Yes, that's what he said. For ten years he'd sent girls cigarettes and offered them cigarettes and sat with them in corners while they smoked cigarettes. But he didn't want his wife smoking. Wasn't it typical?

Oh, well, I didn't care. I'd do as I liked once we were married. Then about half way, without the slightest warning, I knew I couldn't marry him. Marry him! Why, I didn't even like him. And the way he made me sit with my hand in his coat pocket was sickening.

"I don't think I'll marry you after all," I said.

"Eh? What?"

"I said I've changed my mind. I won't do it."

"I haven't changed mine."

"I'm not really in love with you."

"You're nervous," he said calmly. "Go ahead and talk. It's the new psychology. Never bury your worries. Talk 'em out and get rid of 'em."

"I was never forbidden to see you."

"All right," he said contentedly. "I knew that all along. What else?"

"Even my hand in your coat pocket is a trick."

"Sure it is, but it's a nice trick. What else?"

"I'm not going to marry you."

"Oh, yes, you are. You can't very well go back, can you? Mother's probably called up the papers already."

Then he sat up and looked at me.

"Now, look here, young lady," he said. "I'm no idiot. I knew before you were born some of the stunts you pulled. I've never been fooled for a minute about them. But you're going to marry me. Why? Because I'm crazy about you. That's why. And that's enough."

It was terrible. And there was no way out, none. The train rumbled on. There was a tunnel and he kissed me. It was a short tunnel.

Somebody behind chuckled.

And then at last it was over, and we were there, and I was being led like a sheep to the altar, and Henry was on the platform with ring and license and all the implements of sacrifice.

"Behold," said Russell from the train platform, "the family friend is on hand. Whose idea was Henry, anyhow? His or yours or mother's?"

Henry came up. He looked cheerful enough, although I fancied he was pale. I liked his necktie. I always liked Henry's ties.

"Hello," he said. "Everything here? Where's your luggage?"

"Baggage car," said Russell. "Look after Kit, Henry, will you? I'll see to it."

He hadn't taken two steps before Henry had clutched my arm.

"I knew you wouldn't," he said. "I can see it in your face."

"Henry!" I gasped. "What am I to do?"

"You're to marry me," he said in a sort of fierce whisper. "Don't stop to argue. I've always meant to marry you. Quick, into the taxi!"

That's all I remember just then, except hearing him say he had the license and the ring, and an uproar from where we'd left Russell and all his money on the platform.

"Wha-what sort of license?" I asked, with my teeth chattering from pure fright. "If it's in Russell's name it's not good, is it?"

"It's in my name," said Henry, grimly.

"But the ring--that's Russell's."

"Not at all," said Henry, still without an atom of tenderness. "I bought it and paid for it. It's got 'From H. to K.' inside of it. Very small," he added hastily. "It's quite narrow, as you requested."

"Henry," I said, sitting up stiffly, "what would I have done if you hadn't been round?"

"You needn't worry about that. After this I'll always be round. I don't intend to be underfoot," he volunteered, "but I'll be within call. As a matter of fact," he added, "I've been within call practically all of the last month. It's taken a lot of time."

If only he had said something agreeable or yielding, or looked anything but grim and efficient, I could have stood it. But, there we were, on our way to be married, and he looked as sentimental as a piano tuner.

All at once it came over me that it was Henry, it always had been Henry, it always would be Henry. And he looked calm and altruistic and rather hollow round his eyes.

"If you're only doing this to save me," I said, "you needn't, you know. I can go home, even if the papers have got it."

"Don't make me any more nervous than I am, Kit," he said. "I'm about evenly divided as to beating you up or kissing you. Any extra strain, and it's one or the other."

"Don't beat me, Henry."

"I'm damnably poor, Kit," he said.

For reply I slid my hand into his coat pocket. He melted quite suddenly after that, and put his arms round me. I knew I was being a fool but I was idiotically happy.

"Henry," I said, "do you know that verse in the Bible, that as a partridge sits on eggs and fails to hatch them, so too the person who gets riches without deserving them?"

He held me off and looked at me as if he suspected my sanity. Then he kissed me.

V

Mother has never really forgiven me. It put her in so awfully wrong, of course. For she called up the newspapers, and said that if they received a report that I had eloped with Mr. Russell Hill, they were please to deny it.

Of course they sent reporters everywhere at once. And they traced me to the station. About the time mother was reading the headlines "Society Bud and Well-Known Clubman Elope," and wiring Madge, she got Henry's telegram.

She thinks I threw away the chance of a lifetime. But since the day before yesterday I've been wondering. I was going over Henry's old suits, getting them ready to be cleaned and pressed. We have to be very economical. And in a pocket I came across this letter:

"DEAR BOY: We have decided on the eleven-o'clock train. For the love of Mike don't miss meeting it! And after thinking it over carefully, you're right. When I go to see after the luggage will be the best time.

"Yours,

"RUSSELL."

The Rest Cure

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of A Thief in the Night, by E. W. Hornung

I had not seen Raffles for a month or more, and I was sadly in need of his advice. My life was being made a burden to me by a wretch who had obtained a bill of sale over the furniture in Mount Street, and it was only by living elsewhere that I could keep the vulpine villain from my door. This cost ready money, and my balance at the bank was sorely in need of another lift from Raffles. Yet, had he been in my shoes, he could not have vanished more effectually than he had done, both from the face of the town and from the ken of all who knew him.

It was late in August; he never played first-class cricket after July, when, a scholastic understudy took his place in the Middlesex eleven. And in vain did I scour my Field and my Sportsman for the country-house matches with which he wilfully preferred to wind up the season; the matches were there, but never the magic name of A. J. Raffles. Nothing was known of him at the Albany; he had left no instructions about his letters, either there or at the club. I began to fear that some evil had overtaken him. I scanned the features of captured criminals in the illustrated Sunday papers; on each occasion I breathed again; nor was anything worthy of Raffles going on. I will not deny that I was less anxious on his account than on my own. But it was a double relief to me when he gave a first characteristic sign of life.

I had called at the Albany for the fiftieth time, and returned to Piccadilly in my usual despair, when a street sloucher sidled up to me in furtive fashion and inquired if my name was what it is.

"'Cause this 'ere's for you," he rejoined to my affirmative, and with that I felt a crumpled note in my palm.

It was from Raffles. I smoothed out the twisted scrap of paper, and on it were just a couple of lines in pencil:

"Meet me in Holland Walk at dark to-night. Walk up and down till I come.
A. J. R."

That was all! Not another syllable after all these weeks, and the few words scribbled in a wild caricature of his scholarly and dainty hand! I was no longer to be alarmed by this sort of thing; it was all so like the Raffles I loved least; and to add to my indignation, when at length I looked up from the mysterious missive, the equally mysterious messenger had disappeared in a manner worthy of the whole affair. He was, however, the first creature I espied under the tattered trees of Holland Walk that evening.

"Seen 'im yet?" he inquired confidentially, blowing a vile cloud from his horrid pipe.

"No, I haven't; and I want to know where you've seen him," I replied sternly. "Why did you run away like that the moment you had given me his note?"

"Orders, orders," was the reply. "I ain't such a juggins as to go agen a toff as makes it worf while to do as I'm bid an' 'old me tongue."

"And who may you be?" I asked jealously. "And what are you to Mr. Raffles?"

"You silly ass, Bunny, don't tell all Kensington that I'm in town!" replied my tatterdemalion, shooting up and smoothing out into a merely shabby Raffles. "Here, take my arm--I'm not so beastly as I look. But neither am I in town, nor in England, nor yet on the face of the earth, for all that's known of me to a single soul but you."

"Then where are you," I asked, "between ourselves?"

"I've taken a house near here for the holidays, where I'm going in for a Rest Cure of my own description. Why? Oh, for lots of reasons, my dear Bunny; among others, I have long had a wish to grow my own beard; under the next lamppost you will agree that it's training on very nicely. Then, you mayn't know it, but there's a canny man at Scotland Yard who has had a quiet eye on me longer than I like. I thought it about time to have an eye on him, and I stared him in the face outside the Albany this very morning. That was when I saw you go in, and scribbled a line to give you when you came out. If he had caught us talking he would have spotted me at once."

"So you are lying low out here!"

"I prefer to call it my Rest Cure," returned Raffles, "and it's really nothing else. I've got a furnished house at a time when no one else would have dreamed of taking one in town; and my very neighbors don't know I'm there, though I'm bound to say there are hardly any of them at home. I don't keep a servant, and do everything for myself. It's the next best fun to a desert island. Not that I make much work, for I'm really resting, but I haven't done so much solid reading for years. Rather a joke, Bunny: the man whose house I've taken is one of her Majesty's inspectors of prisons, and his study's a storehouse of criminology. It has been quite amusing to lie on one's back and have a good look at one's self as others fondly imagine they see one."

"But surely you get some exercise?" I asked; for he was leading me at a good rate through the leafy byways of Camp den Hill; and his step was as springy and as light as ever.

"The best exercise I ever had in my life," said Raffles; "and you would

never live to guess what it is. It's one of the reasons why I went in for this seedy kit. I follow cabs. Yes, Bunny, I turn out about dusk and meet the expresses at Euston or King's Cross; that is, of course, I loaf outside and pick my cab, and often run my three or four miles for a bob or less. And it not only keeps you in the very pink: if you're good they let you carry the trunks up-stairs; and I've taken notes from the inside of more than one commodious residence which will come in useful in the autumn. In fact, Bunny, what with these new Rowton houses, my beard, and my otherwise well-spent holiday, I hope to have quite a good autumn season before the erratic Raffles turns up in town."

I felt it high time to wedge in a word about my own far less satisfactory affairs. But it was not necessary for me to recount half my troubles. Raffles could be as full of himself as many a worse man, and I did not like his society the less for these human outpourings. They had rather the effect of putting me on better terms with myself, through bringing him down to my level for the time being. But his egoism was not even skin-deep; it was rather a cloak, which Raffles could cast off quicker than any man I ever knew, as he did not fail to show me now.

"Why, Bunny, this is the very thing!" he cried. "You must come and stay with me, and we'll lie low side by side. Only remember it really is a Rest Cure. I want to keep literally as quiet as I was without you. What do you say to forming ourselves at once into a practically Silent Order? You agree? Very well, then, here's the street and that's the house."

It was ever such a quiet little street, turning out of one of those which climb right over the pleasant hill. One side was monopolized by the garden wall of an ugly but enviable mansion standing in its own ground; opposite were a solid file of smaller but taller houses; on neither side were there many windows alight, nor a solitary soul on the pavement or in the road. Raffles led the way to one of the small tall houses. It stood immediately behind a lamppost, and I could not but notice that a love-lock of Virginia creeper was trailing almost to the step, and that the bow-window on the ground floor was closely shuttered. Raffles admitted himself with his latch-key, and I squeezed past him into a very narrow hall. I did not hear him shut the door, but we were no longer in the lamplight, and he pushed softly past me in his turn.

"I'll get a light," he muttered as he went; but to let him pass I had leaned against some electric switches, and while 'his back was turned I tried one of these without thinking. In an instant hall and staircase were flooded with light; in another Raffles was upon me in a fury, and, all was dark once more. He had not said a word, but I heard him breathing through his teeth.

Nor was there anything to tell me now. The mere flash of electric light upon a hail of chaos and uncarpeted stairs, and on the face of Raffles as he sprang to switch it off, had been enough even for me.

"So this is how you have taken the house," said I in his own undertone. "'Taken' is good; 'taken' is beautiful!"

"Did you think I'd done it through an agent?" he snarled. "Upon my word, Bunny, I did you the credit of supposing you saw the joke all the time!"

"Why shouldn't you take a house," I asked, "and pay for it?"

"Why should I," he retorted, "within three miles of the Albany? Besides, I should have had no peace; and I meant every word I said about my Rest Cure."

"You are actually staying in a house where you've broken in to steal?"

"Not to steal, Bunny! I haven't stolen a thing. But staying here I certainly am, and having the most complete rest a busy man could wish."

"There'll be no rest for me!"

Raffles laughed as he struck a match. I had followed him into what would have been the back drawing-room in the ordinary little London house; the inspector of prisons had converted it into a separate study by filling the folding doors with book-shelves, which I scanned at once for the congenial works of which Raffles had spoken. I was not able to carry my examination very far. Raffles had lighted a candle, stuck (by its own grease) in the crown of an opera hat, which he opened the moment the wick caught. The light thus struck the ceiling in an oval shaft, which left the rest of the room almost as dark as it had been before.

"Sorry, Bunny!" said Raffles, sitting on one pedestal of a desk from which the top had been removed, and setting his makeshift lantern on the other. "In broad daylight, when it can't be spotted from the outside, you shall have as much artificial light as you like. If you want to do some writing, that's the top of the desk on end against the mantelpiece. You'll never have a better chance so far as interruption goes. But no midnight oil or electricity! You observe that their last care was to fix up these shutters; they appear to have taken the top off the desk to get at 'em without standing on it; but the beastly things wouldn't go all the way up, and the strip they leave would give us away to the backs of the other houses if we lit up after dark. Mind that telephone! If you touch the receiver they will know at the exchange that the house is not empty, and I wouldn't put it past the colonel to have told them exactly how long he was going to be away.

He's pretty particular: look at the strips of paper to keep the dust off his precious books!"

"Is he a colonel?" I asked, perceiving that Raffles referred to the absentee householder.

"Of sappers," he replied, "and a V.C. into the bargain, confound him! Got it at Rorke's Drift; prison governor or inspector ever since; favorite recreation, what do you think? Revolver shooting! You can read all about him in his own Who's Who. A devil of a chap to tackle, Bunny, when he's at home!"

"And where is he now?" I asked uneasily. "And do you know he isn't on his way home?"

"Switzerland," replied Raffles, chuckling; "he wrote one too many labels, and was considerate enough to leave it behind for our guidance. Well, no one ever comes back from Switzerland at the beginning of September, you know; and nobody ever thinks of coming back before the servants. When they turn up they won't get in. I keep the latch jammed, but the servants will think it's jammed itself, and while they're gone for the locksmith we shall walk out like gentlemen--if we haven't done so already."

"As you walked in, I suppose?"

Raffles shook his head in the dim light to which my sight was growing inured.

"No, Bunny, I regret to say I came in through the dormer window. They were painting next door but one. I never did like ladder work, but it takes less time than in picking a lock in the broad light of a street lamp."

"So they left you a latch-key as well as everything else!"

"No, Bunny. I was just able to make that for myself. I am playing at 'Robinson Crusoe,' not 'The Swiss Family Robinson.' And now, my dear Friday, if you will kindly take off those boots, we can explore the island before we turn in for the night."

The stairs were very steep and narrow, and they creaked alarmingly as Raffles led the way up, with the single candle in the crown of the colonel's hat. He blew it out before we reached the half-landing, where a naked window stared upon the backs of the houses in the next road, but lit it again at the drawing-room door. I just peeped in upon a semi-grand swathed in white and a row of water colors mounted in gold. An excellent bathroom broke our journey to the second floor.

"I'll have one to-night," said I, taking heart of a luxury unknown in my last sordid sanctuary.

"You'll do no such thing," snapped Raffles. "Have the goodness to remember that our island is one of a group inhabited by hostile tribes. You can fill the bath quietly if you try, but it empties under the study window, and makes the very devil of a noise about it. No, Bunny, I bale out every drop and pour it away through the scullery sink, so you will kindly consult me before you turn a tap. Here's your room; hold the light outside while I draw the curtains; it's the old chap's dressing-room. Now you can bring the glim. How's that for a jolly wardrobe? And look at his coats on their cross-trees inside: dapper old dog, shouldn't you say? Mark the boots on the shelf above, and the little brass rail for his ties! Didn't I tell you he was particular? And wouldn't he simply love to catch us at his kit?"

"Let's only hope it would give him an apoplexy," said I shuddering.

"I shouldn't build on it," replied Raffles. "That's a big man's trouble, and neither you nor I could get into the old chap's clothes. But come into the best bedroom, Bunny. You won't think me selfish if I don't give it up to you? Look at this, my boy, look at this! It's the only one I use in all the house."

I had followed him into a good room, with ample windows closely curtained, and he had switched on the light in a hanging lamp at the bedside. The rays fell from a thick green funnel in a plateful of strong light upon a table deep in books. I noticed several volumes of the "Invasion of the Crimea."

"That's where I rest the body and exercise the brain," said Raffles. "I have long wanted to read my Kinglake from A to Z, and I manage about a volume a night. There's a style for you, Bunny! I love the punctilious thoroughness of the whole thing; one can understand its appeal to our careful colonel. His name, did you say? Crutchley, Bunny--Colonel Crutchley, R.E., V.C."

"We'd put his valor to the test!" said I, feeling more valiant myself after our tour of inspection.

"Not so loud on the stairs," whispered Raffles. "There's only one door between us and--"

Raffles stood still at my feet, and well he might! A deafening double knock had resounded through the empty house; and to add to the utter horror of the moment, Raffles instantly blew out the light. I heard my heart pounding. Neither of us breathed. We were on our way down to the first landing, and for a moment we stood like mice; then Raffles heaved a deep sigh, and in the depths I heard the gate swing home.

"Only the postman, Bunny! He will come now and again, though they have obviously left instructions at the post-office. I hope the old colonel will let them have it when he gets back. I confess it gave me a turn."

"Turn!" I gasped. "I must have a drink, if I die for it."

"My dear Bunny, that's no part of my Rest Cure."

"Then good-by! I can't stand it; feel my forehead; listen to my heart! Crusoe found a footprint, but he never heard a double-knock at the street door!"

"Better live in the midst of alarms," quoted Raffles, "than dwell in this horrible place.' I must confess we get it both ways, Bunny. Yet I've nothing but tea in the house."

"And where do you make that? Aren't you afraid of smoke?"

"There's a gas-stove in the dining-room."

"But surely to goodness," I cried, "there's a cellar lower down!"

"My dear, good Bunny," said Raffles, "I've told you already that I didn't come in here on business. I came in for the Cure. Not a penny will these people be the worse, except for their washing and their electric light, and I mean to leave enough to cover both items."

"Then," said I, "since Brutus is such a very honorable man, we will borrow a bottle from the cellar, and replace it before we go."

Raffles slapped me softly on the back, and I knew that I had gained my point. It was often the case when I had the presence of heart and mind to stand up to him. But never was little victory of mine quite so grateful as this. Certainly it was a very small cellar, indeed a mere cupboard under the kitchen stairs, with a most ridiculous lock. Nor was this cupboard overstocked with wine. But I made out a jar of whiskey, a shelf of Zeltinger, another of claret, and a short one at the top which presented a little battery of golden-leafed necks and corks. Raffles set his hand no lower. He examined the labels while I held folded hat and naked light.

"Mumm, '84!" he whispered. "G. H. Mumm, and A.D. 1884! I am no wine-bibber, Bunny, as you know, but I hope you appreciate the specifications as I do. It looks to me like the only bottle, the last of its case, and it does seem a bit of a shame; but more shame for the miser who hoards in his cellar what was meant for mankind! Come, Bunny, lead the way. This baby is worth nursing. It would break my heart if anything happened to it now!"

So we celebrated my first night in the furnished house; and I slept beyond belief, slept as I never was to sleep there again. But it was strange to hear the milkman in the early morning, and the postman knocking his way along the street an hour later, and to be passed over by one destroying angel after another. I had come down early enough, and watched through the drawing-room blind the cleansing of all the steps in the street but ours. Yet Raffles had evidently been up some time; the house seemed far purer than overnight as though he had managed to air it room by room; and from the one with the gas-stove there came a frizzling sound that fattened the heart.

I only would I had the pen to do justice to the week I spent in-doors on Campden Hill! It might make amusing reading; the reality for me was far removed from the realm of amusement. Not that I was denied many a laugh of suppressed heartiness when Raffles and I were together. But half our time we very literally saw nothing of each other. I need not say whose fault that was. He would be quiet; he was in ridiculous and offensive earnest about his egregious Cure. Kinglake he would read by the hour together, day and night, by the hanging lamp, lying up-stairs on the best bed. There was daylight enough for me in the drawing-room below; and there I would sit immersed in criminous tomes weakly fascinated until I shivered and shook in my stocking soles. Often I longed to do something hysterically desperate, to rouse Raffles and bring the street about our ears; once I did bring him about mine by striking a single note on the piano, with the soft pedal down. His neglect of me seemed wanton at the time. I have long realized that he was only wise to maintain silence at the expense of perilous amenities, and as fully justified in those secret and solitary sorties which made bad blood in my veins. He was far cleverer than I at getting in and out; but even had I been his match for stealth and wariness, my company would have doubled every risk. I admit now that he treated me with quite as much sympathy as common caution would permit. But at the time I took it so badly as to plan a small revenge.

What with his flourishing beard and the increasing shabbiness of the only suit he had brought with him to the house, there was no denying that Raffles had now the advantage of a permanent disguise. That was another of his excuses for leaving me as he did, and it was the one I was determined to remove. On a morning, therefore, when I awoke to find him flown again, I proceeded to execute a plan which I had already matured in my mind. Colonel Crutchley was a married man; there were no signs of children in the house; on the other hand, there was much evidence that the wife was a woman of fashion. Her dresses overflowed the wardrobe and her room; large, flat, cardboard boxes were to be found in every corner of the upper floors. She was a tall woman; I was not too tall a man. Like Raffles, I had not shaved on Campden Hill. That morning, however, I did my best with a very fair razor which the colonel had left behind in my room; then I turned out the lady's

wardrobe and the cardboard boxes, and took my choice.

I have fair hair, and at the time it was rather long. With a pair of Mrs. Crutchley's tongs and a discarded hair-net, I was able to produce an almost immodest fringe. A big black hat with a wintry feather completed a headdress as unseasonable as my skating skirt and feather boa; of course, the good lady had all her summer frocks away with her in Switzerland. This was all the more annoying from the fact that we were having a very warm September; so I was not sorry to hear Raffles return as I was busy adding a layer of powder to my heated countenance. I listened a moment on the landing, but as he went into the study I determined to complete my toilet in every detail. My idea was first to give him the fright he deserved, and secondly to show him that I was quite as fit to move abroad as he. It was, however, I confess, a pair of the colonel's gloves that I was buttoning as I slipped down to the study even more quietly than usual. The electric light was on, as it generally was by day, and under it stood as formidable a figure as ever I encountered in my life of crime.

Imagine a thin but extremely wiry man, past middle age, brown and bloodless as any crabapple, but as coolly truculent and as casually alert as Raffles at his worst. It was, it could only be, the fire-eating and prison-inspecting colonel himself! He was ready for me, a revolver in his hand, taken, as I could see, from one of those locked drawers in the pedestal desk with which Raffles had refused to tamper; the drawer was open, and a bunch of keys depended from the lock. A grim smile crumpled up the parchment face, so that one eye was puckered out of sight; the other was propped open by an eyeglass, which, however, dangled on its string when I appeared.

"A woman, begad!" the warrior exclaimed. "And where's the man, you scarlet hussy?"

Not a word could I utter. But, in my horror and my amazement, I have no sort of doubt that I acted the part I had assumed in a manner I never should have approached in happier circumstances.

"Come, come, my lass," cried the old oak veteran, "I'm not going to put a bullet through you, you know! You tell me all about it, and it'll do you more good than harm. There, I'll put the nasty thing away and--God bless me, if the brazen wench hasn't squeezed into the wife's kit!"

A squeeze it happened to have been, and in my emotion it felt more of one than ever; but his sudden discovery had not heightened the veteran's animosity against me. On the contrary, I caught a glint of humor through his gleaming glass, and he proceeded to pocket his revolver like the gentleman he was.

"Well, well, it's lucky I looked in," he continued. "I only came round

on the off-chance of letters, but if I hadn't you'd have had another week in clover. Begad, though, I saw your handwriting the moment I'd got my nose inside! Now just be sensible and tell me where your good man is."

I had no man. I was alone, had broken in alone. There was not a soul in the affair (much less the house) except myself. So much I stuttered out in tones too hoarse to betray me on the spot. But the old man of the world shook a hard old head.

"Quite right not to give away your pal," said he. "But I'm not one of the marines, my dear, and you mustn't expect me to swallow all that. Well, if you won't say, you won't, and we must just send for those who will."

In a flash I saw his fell design. The telephone directory lay open on one of the pedestals. He must have been consulting it when he heard me on the stairs; he had another look at it now; and that gave me my opportunity. With a presence of mind rare enough in me to excuse the boast, I flung myself upon the instrument in the corner and hurled it to the ground with all my might. I was myself sent spinning into the opposite corner at the same instant. But the instrument happened to be a standard of the more elaborate pattern, and I flattered myself that I had put the delicate engine out of action for the day.

Not that my adversary took the trouble to ascertain. He was looking at me strangely in the electric light, standing intently on his guard, his right hand in the pocket where he had dropped his revolver. And I--I hardly knew it--but I caught up the first thing handy for self-defence, and was brandishing the bottle which Raffles and I had emptied in honor of my arrival on this fatal scene.

"Be shot if I don't believe you're the man himself!" cried the colonel, shaking an armed fist in my face. "You young wolf in sheep's clothing. Been at my wine, of course! Put down that bottle; down with it this instant, or I'll drill a tunnel through your middle. I thought so! Begad, sir, you shall pay for this! Don't you give me an excuse for potting you now, or I'll jump at the chance! My last bottle of '84--you miserable blackguard--you unutterable beast!"

He had browbeaten me into his own chair in his own corner; he was standing over me, empty bottle in one hand, revolver in the other, and murder itself in the purple puckers of his raging face. His language I will not even pretend to indicate: his skinny throat swelled and trembled with the monstrous volleys. He could smile at my appearance in his wife's clothes; he would have had my blood for the last bottle of his best champagne. His eyes were not hidden now; they needed no eyeglass to prop them open; large with fury, they started from the livid mask. I watched nothing else. I could not understand why they

should start out as they did. I did not try. I say I watched nothing else--until I saw the face of Raffles over the unfortunate officer's shoulder.

Raffles had crept in unheard while our altercation was at its height, had watched his opportunity, and stolen on his man unobserved by either of us. While my own attention was completely engrossed, he had seized the colonel's pistol-hand and twisted it behind the colonel's back until his eyes bulged out as I have endeavored to describe. But the fighting man had some fight in him still; and scarcely had I grasped the situation when he hit out venomously behind with the bottle, which was smashed to bits on Raffles's shin. Then I threw my strength into the scale; and before many minutes we had our officer gagged and bound in his chair. But it was not one of our bloodless victories. Raffles had been cut to the bone by the broken glass; his leg bled wherever he limped; and the fierce eyes of the bound man followed the wet trail with gleams of sinister satisfaction.

I thought I had never seen a man better bound or better gagged. But the humanity seemed to have run out of Raffles with his blood. He tore up tablecloths, he cut down blind-cords, he brought the dust-sheets from the drawing-room, and multiplied every bond. The unfortunate man's legs were lashed to the legs of his chair, his arms to its arms, his thighs and back fairly welded to the leather. Either end of his own ruler protruded from his bulging cheeks--the middle was hidden by his moustache--and the gag kept in place by remorseless lashings at the back of his head. It was a spectacle I could not bear to contemplate at length, while from the first I found myself physically unable to face the ferocious gaze of those implacable eyes. But Raffles only laughed at my squeamishness, and flung a dust-sheet over man and chair; and the stark outline drove me from the room.

It was Raffles at his worst, Raffles as I never knew him before or after--a Raffles mad with pain and rage, and desperate as any other criminal in the land. Yet he had struck no brutal blow, he had uttered no disgraceful taunt, and probably not inflicted a tithe of the pain he had himself to bear. It is true that he was flagrantly in the wrong, his victim as laudably in the right. Nevertheless, granting the original sin of the situation, and given this unforeseen development, even I failed to see how Raffles could have combined greater humanity with any regard for our joint safety; and had his barbarities ended here, I for one should not have considered them an extraordinary aggravation of an otherwise minor offence. But in the broad daylight of the bathroom, which had a ground-glass window but no blind, I saw at once the serious nature of his wound and of its effect upon the man.

"It will maim me for a month," said he; "and if the V.C. comes out alive, the wound he gave may be identified with the wound I've got."

The V.C.! There, indeed, was an aggravation to one illogical mind. But to cast a moment's doubt upon the certainty of his coming out alive!

"Of course he'll come out," said I. "We must make up our minds to that."

"Did he tell you he was expecting the servants or his wife? If so, of course we must hurry up."

"No, Raffles, I'm afraid he's not expecting anybody. He told me, if he hadn't looked in for letters, we should have had the place to ourselves another week. That's the worst of it."

Raffles smiled as he secured a regular puttee of dust-sheeting. No blood was coming through.

"I don't agree, Bunny," said he. "It's quite the best of it, if you ask me."

"What, that he should die the death?"

"Why not?"

And Raffles stared me out with a hard and merciless light in his clear blue eyes--a light that chilled the blood.

"If it's a choice between his life and our liberty, you're entitled to your decision and I'm entitled to mine, and I took it before I bound him as I did," said Raffles. "I'm only sorry I took so much trouble if you're going to stay behind and put him in the way of releasing himself before he gives up the ghost. Perhaps you will go and think it over while I wash my bags and dry 'em at the gas stove. It will take me at least an hour, which will just give me time to finish the last volume of Kinglake."

Long before he was ready to go, however, I was waiting in the hall, clothed indeed, but not in a mind which I care to recall. Once or twice I peered into the dining-room where Raffles sat before the stove, without letting him hear me. He, too, was ready for the street at a moment's notice; but a steam ascended from his left leg, as he sat immersed in his red volume. Into the study I never went again; but Raffles did, to restore to its proper shelf this and every other book he had taken out and so destroy that clew to the manner of man who had made himself at home in the house. On his last visit I heard him whisk off the dust-sheet; then he waited a minute; and when he came out it was to lead the way into the open air as though the accursed house belonged to him.

"We shall be seen," I whispered at his heels. "Raffles, Raffles,

there's a policeman at the corner!"

"I know him intimately," replied Raffles, turning, however, the other way. "He accosted me on Monday, when I explained that I was an old soldier of the colonel's regiment, who came in every few days to air the place and send on any odd letters. You see, I have always carried one or two about me, redirected to that address in Switzerland, and when I showed them to him it was all right. But after that it was no use listening at the letter-box for a clear coast, was it?"

I did not answer; there was too much to exasperate in these prodigies of cunning which he could never trouble to tell me at the time. And I knew why he had kept his latest feats to himself: unwilling to trust me outside the house, he had systematically exaggerated the dangers of his own walks abroad; and when to these injuries he added the insult of a patronizing compliment on my late disguise, I again made no reply.

"What's the good of your coming with me he asked, when I had followed him across the main stream of Notting Hill.

"We may as well sink or swim together," I answered sullenly.

"Yes? Well, I'm going to swim into the provinces, have a shave on the way, buy a new kit piecemeal, including a cricket-bag (which I really want), and come limping back to the Albany with the same old strain in my bowling leg. I needn't add that I have been playing country-house cricket for the last month under an alias; it's the only decent way to do it when one's county has need of one. That's my itinerary, Bunny, but I really can't see why you should come with me."

"We may as well swing together!" I growled.

"As you will, my dear fellow," replied Raffles. "But I begin to dread your company on the drop!"

I shall hold my pen on that provincial tour. Not that I joined Raffles in any of the little enterprises with which he beguiled the breaks in our journey; our last deed in London was far too great a weight upon my soul. I could see that gallant officer in his chair, see him at every hour of the day and night, now with his indomitable eyes meeting mine ferociously, now a stark outline underneath a sheet. The vision darkened my day and gave me sleepless nights. I was with our victim in all his agony; my mind would only leave him for that gallows of which Raffles had said true things in jest. No, I could not face so vile a death lightly, but I could meet it, somehow, better than I could endure a guilty suspense. In the watches of the second night I made up my mind to meet it halfway, that very morning, while still there might be time to save the life that we had left in jeopardy. And I got up early to tell Raffles of my resolve.

His room in the hotel where we were staying was littered with clothes and luggage new enough for any bridegroom; I lifted the locked cricket-bag, and found it heavier than a cricket-bag has any right to be. But in the bed Raffles was sleeping like an infant, his shaven self once more. And when I shook him he awoke with a smile.

"Going to confess, eh, Bunny? Well, wait a bit; the local police won't thank you for knocking them up at this hour. And I bought a late edition which you ought to see; that must be it on the floor. You have a look in the stop-press column, Bunny."

I found the place with a sunken heart, and this is what I read:

WEST-END OUTRAGE

Colonel Crutchley, R.E., V.C., has been the victim of a dastardly outrage at his residence, Peter Street, Campden Hill. Returning unexpectedly to the house, which had been left untenanted during the absence of the family abroad, it was found occupied by two ruffians, who overcame and secured the distinguished officer by the exercise of considerable violence. When discovered through the intelligence of the Kensington police, the gallant victim was gagged and bound hand and foot, and in an advanced stage of exhaustion.

"Thanks to the Kensington police," observed Raffles, as I read the last words aloud in my horror. "They can't have gone when they got my letter."

"Your letter?"

"I printed them a line while we were waiting for our train at Euston. They must have got it that night, but they can't have paid any attention to it until yesterday morning. And when they do, they take all the credit and give me no more than you did, Bunny!"

I looked at the curly head upon the pillow, at the smiling, handsome face under the curls. And at last I understood.

"So all the time you never meant it!"

"Slow murder? You should have known me better. A few hours' enforced Rest Cure was the worst I wished him."

"You might have told me, Raffles!"

"That may be, Bunny, but you ought certainly to have trusted me!"

The End of Bukawai

from: Project Gutenberg's Jungle Tales of Tarzan, by Edgar Rice Burroughs

WHEN TARZAN OF the Apes was still but a boy he had learned, among other things, to fashion pliant ropes of fibrous jungle grass. Strong and tough were the ropes of Tarzan, the little Tarmangani. Tublat, his foster father, would have told you this much and more. Had you tempted him with a handful of fat caterpillars he even might have sufficiently unbended to narrate to you a few stories of the many indignities which Tarzan had heaped upon him by means of his hated rope; but then Tublat always worked himself into such a frightful rage when he devoted any considerable thought either to the rope or to Tarzan, that it might not have proved comfortable for you to have remained close enough to him to hear what he had to say.

So often had that snakelike noose settled unexpectedly over Tublat's head, so often had he been jerked ridiculously and painfully from his feet when he was least looking for such an occurrence, that there is little wonder he found scant space in his savage heart for love of his white-skinned foster child, or the inventions thereof. There had been other times, too, when Tublat had swung helplessly in midair, the noose tightening about his neck, death staring him in the face, and little Tarzan dancing upon a near-by limb, taunting him and making unseemly grimaces.

Then there had been another occasion in which the rope had figured prominently--an occasion, and the only one connected with the rope, which Tublat recalled with pleasure. Tarzan, as active in brain as he was in body, was always inventing new ways in which to play. It was through the medium of play that he learned much during his childhood. This day he learned something, and that he did not lose his life in the learning of it, was a matter of great surprise to Tarzan, and the fly in the ointment, to Tublat.

The man-child had, in throwing his noose at a playmate in a tree above him, caught a projecting branch instead. When he tried to shake it loose it but drew the tighter. Then Tarzan started to climb the rope to remove it from the branch. When he was part way up a frolicsome playmate seized that part of the rope which lay upon the ground and ran off with it as far as he could go. When Tarzan screamed at him to desist, the young ape released the rope a little and then drew it tight again. The result was to impart a swinging motion to Tarzan's body which the ape-boy suddenly realized was a new and pleasurable form of play. He urged the ape to continue until Tarzan was swinging to and fro as far as the short length of rope would permit, but the distance was not great enough, and, too, he was not far enough above the ground to give the necessary thrills which add so greatly to the pastimes of the young.

So he clambered to the branch where the noose was caught and after removing it carried the rope far aloft and out upon a long and powerful branch. Here he again made it fast, and taking the loose end in his hand, clambered quickly down among the branches as far as the rope would permit him to go; then he swung out upon the end of it, his lithe, young body turning and twisting--a human bob upon a pendulum of grass--thirty feet above the ground.

Ah, how delectable! This was indeed a new play of the first magnitude. Tarzan was entranced. Soon he discovered that by wriggling his body in just the right way at the proper time he could diminish or accelerate his oscillation, and, being a boy, he chose, naturally, to accelerate. Presently he was swinging far and wide, while below him, the apes of the tribe of Kerchak looked on in mild amaze.

Had it been you or I swinging there at the end of that grass rope, the thing which presently happened would not have happened, for we could not have hung on so long as to have made it possible; but Tarzan was quite as much at home swinging by his hands as he was standing upon his feet, or, at least, almost. At any rate he felt no fatigue long after the time that an ordinary mortal would have been numb with the strain of the physical exertion. And this was his undoing.

Tublat was watching him as were others of the tribe. Of all the creatures of the wild, there was none Tublat so cordially hated as he did this hideous, hairless, white-skinned, caricature of an ape. But for Tarzan's nimbleness, and the zealous watchfulness of savage Kala's mother love, Tublat would long since have rid himself of this stain upon his family escutcheon. So long had it been since Tarzan became a member of the tribe, that Tublat had forgotten the circumstances surrounding the entrance of the jungle waif into his family, with the result that he now imagined that Tarzan was his own offspring, adding greatly to his chagrin.

Wide and far swung Tarzan of the Apes, until at last, as he reached the highest point of the arc the rope, which rapidly had frayed on the rough bark of the tree limb, parted suddenly. The watching apes saw the smooth, brown body shoot outward, and down, plummet-like. Tublat leaped high in the air, emitting what in a human being would have been an exclamation of delight. This would be the end of Tarzan and most of Tublat's troubles. From now on he could lead his life in peace and security.

Tarzan fell quite forty feet, alighting on his back in a thick bush. Kala was the first to reach his side--ferocious, hideous, loving Kala. She had seen the life crushed from her own balu in just such a fall years before. Was she to lose this one too in the same way? Tarzan was

lying quite still when she found him, embedded deeply in the bush. It took Kala several minutes to disentangle him and drag him forth; but he was not killed. He was not even badly injured. The bush had broken the force of the fall. A cut upon the back of his head showed where he had struck the tough stem of the shrub and explained his unconsciousness.

In a few minutes he was as active as ever. Tublat was furious. In his rage he snapped at a fellow-ape without first discovering the identity of his victim, and was badly mauled for his ill temper, having chosen to vent his spite upon a husky and belligerent young bull in the full prime of his vigor.

But Tarzan had learned something new. He had learned that continued friction would wear through the strands of his rope, though it was many years before this knowledge did more for him than merely to keep him from swinging too long at a time, or too far above the ground at the end of his rope.

The day came, however, when the very thing that had once all but killed him proved the means of saving his life.

He was no longer a child, but a mighty jungle male. There was none now to watch over him, solicitously, nor did he need such. Kala was dead. Dead, too, was Tublat, and though with Kala passed the one creature that ever really had loved him, there were still many who hated him after Tublat departed unto the arms of his fathers. It was not that he was more cruel or more savage than they that they hated him, for though he was both cruel and savage as were the beasts, his fellows, yet too was he often tender, which they never were. No, the thing which brought Tarzan most into disrepute with those who did not like him, was the possession and practice of a characteristic which they had not and could not understand--the human sense of humor. In Tarzan it was a trifle broad, perhaps, manifesting itself in rough and painful practical jokes upon his friends and cruel baiting of his enemies.

But to neither of these did he owe the enmity of Bukawai, the witch-doctor, who dwelt in the cave between the two hills far to the north of the village of Mbonga, the chief. Bukawai was jealous of Tarzan, and Bukawai it was who came near proving the undoing of the ape-man. For months Bukawai had nursed his hatred while revenge seemed remote indeed, since Tarzan of the Apes frequented another part of the jungle, miles away from the lair of Bukawai. Only once had the black witch-doctor seen the devil-god, as he was most often called among the blacks, and upon that occasion Tarzan had robbed him of a fat fee, at the same time putting the lie in the mouth of Bukawai, and making his medicine seem poor medicine. All this Bukawai never could forgive, though it seemed unlikely that the opportunity would come to be revenged.

Yet it did come, and quite unexpectedly. Tarzan was hunting far to the north. He had wandered away from the tribe, as he did more and more often as he approached maturity, to hunt alone for a few days. As a child he had enjoyed romping and playing with the young apes, his companions; but now these play-fellows of his had grown to surly, lowering bulls, or to touchy, suspicious mothers, jealously guarding helpless balus. So Tarzan found in his own man-mind a greater and a truer companionship than any or all of the apes of Kerchak could afford him.

This day, as Tarzan hunted, the sky slowly became overcast. Torn clouds, whipped to ragged streamers, fled low above the tree tops. They reminded Tarzan of frightened antelope fleeing the charge of a hungry lion. But though the light clouds raced so swiftly, the jungle was motionless. Not a leaf quivered and the silence was a great, dead weight--insupportable. Even the insects seemed stilled by apprehension of some frightful thing impending, and the larger things were soundless. Such a forest, such a jungle might have stood there in the beginning of that unthinkable far-gone age before God peopled the world with life, when there were no sounds because there were no ears to hear.

And over all lay a sickly, pallid ocher light through which the scourged clouds raced. Tarzan had seen all these conditions many times before, yet he never could escape a strange feeling at each recurrence of them. He knew no fear, but in the face of Nature's manifestations of her cruel, immeasurable powers, he felt very small--very small and very lonely.

Now he heard a low moaning, far away. "The lions seek their prey," he murmured to himself, looking up once again at the swift-flying clouds. The moaning rose to a great volume of sound. "They come!" said Tarzan of the Apes, and sought the shelter of a thickly foliated tree. Quite suddenly the trees bent their tops simultaneously as though God had stretched a hand from the heavens and pressed His flat palm down upon the world. "They pass!" whispered Tarzan. "The lions pass." Then came a vivid flash of lightning, followed by deafening thunder. "The lions have sprung," cried Tarzan, "and now they roar above the bodies of their kills."

The trees were waving wildly in all directions now, a perfectly demoniacal wind threshed the jungle pitilessly. In the midst of it the rain came--not as it comes upon us of the northlands, but in a sudden, choking, blinding deluge. "The blood of the kill," thought Tarzan, huddling himself closer to the bole of the great tree beneath which he stood.

He was close to the edge of the jungle, and at a little distance he had seen two hills before the storm broke; but now he could see nothing.

It amused him to look out into the beating rain, searching for the two hills and imagining that the torrents from above had washed them away, yet he knew that presently the rain would cease, the sun come out again and all be as it was before, except where a few branches had fallen and here and there some old and rotted patriarch had crashed back to enrich the soil upon which he had fattened for, maybe, centuries. All about him branches and leaves filled the air or fell to earth, torn away by the strength of the tornado and the weight of the water upon them. A gaunt corpse toppled and fell a few yards away; but Tarzan was protected from all these dangers by the wide-spreading branches of the sturdy young giant beneath which his jungle craft had guided him. Here there was but a single danger, and that a remote one. Yet it came. Without warning the tree above him was riven by lightning, and when the rain ceased and the sun came out Tarzan lay stretched as he had fallen, upon his face amidst the wreckage of the jungle giant that should have shielded him.

Bukawai came to the entrance of his cave after the rain and the storm had passed and looked out upon the scene. From his one eye Bukawai could see; but had he had a dozen eyes he could have found no beauty in the fresh sweetness of the revived jungle, for to such things, in the chemistry of temperament, his brain failed to react; nor, even had he had a nose, which he had not for years, could he have found enjoyment or sweetness in the clean-washed air.

At either side of the leper stood his sole and constant companions, the two hyenas, sniffing the air. Presently one of them uttered a low growl and with flattened head started, sneaking and wary, toward the jungle. The other followed. Bukawai, his curiosity aroused, trailed after them, in his hand a heavy knob-stick.

The hyenas halted a few yards from the prostrate Tarzan, sniffing and growling. Then came Bukawai, and at first he could not believe the witness of his own eyes; but when he did and saw that it was indeed the devil-god his rage knew no bounds, for he thought him dead and himself cheated of the revenge he had so long dreamed upon.

The hyenas approached the ape-man with bared fangs. Bukawai, with an inarticulate scream, rushed upon them, striking cruel and heavy blows with his knob-stick, for there might still be life in the apparently lifeless form. The beasts, snapping and snarling, half turned upon their master and their tormentor, but long fear still held them from his putrid throat. They slunk away a few yards and squatted upon their haunches, hatred and baffled hunger gleaming from their savage eyes.

Bukawai stooped and placed his ear above the ape-man's heart. It still beat. As well as his sloughed features could register pleasure they did so; but it was not a pretty sight. At the ape-man's side lay his long, grass rope. Quickly Bukawai bound the limp arms behind his

prisoner's back, then he raised him to one of his shoulders, for, though Bukawai was old and diseased, he was still a strong man. The hyenas fell in behind as the witch-doctor set off toward the cave, and through the long black corridors they followed as Bukawai bore his victim into the bowels of the hills. Through subterranean chambers, connected by winding passageways, Bukawai staggered with his load. At a sudden turning of the corridor, daylight flooded them and Bukawai stepped out into a small, circular basin in the hill, apparently the crater of an ancient volcano, one of those which never reached the dignity of a mountain and are little more than lava-rimmed pits closed to the earth's surface.

Steep walls rimmed the cavity. The only exit was through the passageway by which Bukawai had entered. A few stunted trees grew upon the rocky floor. A hundred feet above could be seen the ragged lips of this cold, dead mouth of hell.

Bukawai propped Tarzan against a tree and bound him there with his own grass rope, leaving his hands free but securing the knots in such a way that the ape-man could not reach them. The hyenas slunk to and fro, growling. Bukawai hated them and they hated him. He knew that they but waited for the time when he should be helpless, or when their hatred should rise to such a height as to submerge their cringing fear of him.

In his own heart was not a little fear of these repulsive creatures, and because of that fear, Bukawai always kept the beasts well fed, often hunting for them when their own forages for food failed, but ever was he cruel to them with the cruelty of a little brain, diseased, bestial, primitive.

He had had them since they were puppies. They had known no other life than that with him, and though they went abroad to hunt, always they returned. Of late Bukawai had come to believe that they returned not so much from habit as from a fiendish patience which would submit to every indignity and pain rather than forego the final vengeance, and Bukawai needed but little imagination to picture what that vengeance would be. Today he would see for himself what his end would be; but another should impersonate Bukawai.

When he had trussed Tarzan securely, Bukawai went back into the corridor, driving the hyenas ahead of him, and pulling across the opening a lattice of laced branches, which shut the pit from the cave during the night that Bukawai might sleep in security, for then the hyenas were penned in the crater that they might not sneak upon a sleeping Bukawai in the darkness.

Bukawai returned to the outer cave mouth, filled a vessel with water at

the spring which rose in the little canon close at hand and returned toward the pit. The hyenas stood before the lattice looking hungrily toward Tarzan. They had been fed in this manner before.

With his water, the witch-doctor approached Tarzan and threw a portion of the contents of the vessel in the ape-man's face. There was fluttering of the eyelids, and at the second application Tarzan opened his eyes and looked about.

"Devil-god," cried Bukawai, "I am the great witch-doctor. My medicine is strong. Yours is weak. If it is not, why do you stay tied here like a goat that is bait for lions?"

Tarzan understood nothing the witch-doctor said, therefore he did not reply, but only stared straight at Bukawai with cold and level gaze. The hyenas crept up behind him. He heard them growl; but he did not even turn his head. He was a beast with a man's brain. The beast in him refused to show fear in the face of a death which the man-mind already admitted to be inevitable.

Bukawai, not yet ready to give his victim to the beasts, rushed upon the hyenas with his knob-stick. There was a short scrimmage in which the brutes came off second best, as they always did. Tarzan watched it. He saw and realized the hatred which existed between the two animals and the hideous semblance of a man.

With the hyenas subdued, Bukawai returned to the baiting of Tarzan; but finding that the ape-man understood nothing he said, the witch-doctor finally desisted. Then he withdrew into the corridor and pulled the latticework barrier across the opening. He went back into the cave and got a sleeping mat, which he brought to the opening, that he might lie down and watch the spectacle of his revenge in comfort.

The hyenas were sneaking furtively around the ape-man. Tarzan strained at his bonds for a moment, but soon realized that the rope he had braided to hold Numa, the lion, would hold him quite as successfully. He did not wish to die; but he could look death in the face now as he had many times before without a quaver.

As he pulled upon the rope he felt it rub against the small tree about which it was passed. Like a flash of the cinematograph upon the screen, a picture was flashed before his mind's eye from the storehouse of his memory. He saw a lithe, boyish figure swinging high above the ground at the end of a rope. He saw many apes watching from below, and then he saw the rope part and the boy hurtle downward toward the ground. Tarzan smiled. Immediately he commenced to draw the rope rapidly back and forth across the tree trunk.

The hyenas, gaining courage, came closer. They sniffed at his legs;

but when he struck at them with his free arms they slunk off. He knew that with the growth of hunger they would attack. Coolly, methodically, without haste, Tarzan drew the rope back and forth against the rough trunk of the small tree.

In the entrance to the cavern Bukawai fell asleep. He thought it would be some time before the beasts gained sufficient courage or hunger to attack the captive. Their growls and the cries of the victim would awaken him. In the meantime he might as well rest, and he did.

Thus the day wore on, for the hyenas were not famished, and the rope with which Tarzan was bound was a stronger one than that of his boyhood, which had parted so quickly to the chafing of the rough tree bark. Yet, all the while hunger was growing upon the beasts and the strands of the grass rope were wearing thinner and thinner. Bukawai slept.

It was late afternoon before one of the beasts, irritated by the gnawing of appetite, made a quick, growling dash at the ape-man. The noise awoke Bukawai. He sat up quickly and watched what went on within the crater. He saw the hungry hyena charge the man, leaping for the unprotected throat. He saw Tarzan reach out and seize the growling animal, and then he saw the second beast spring for the devil-god's shoulder. There was a mighty heave of the great, smooth-skinned body. Rounded muscles shot into great, tensed piles beneath the brown hide--the ape-man surged forward with all his weight and all his great strength--the bonds parted, and the three were rolling upon the floor of the crater snarling, snapping, and rending.

Bukawai leaped to his feet. Could it be that the devil-god was to prevail against his servants? Impossible! The creature was unarmed, and he was down with two hyenas on top of him; but Bukawai did not know Tarzan.

The ape-man fastened his fingers upon the throat of one of the hyenas and rose to one knee, though the other beast tore at him frantically in an effort to pull him down. With a single hand Tarzan held the one, and with the other hand he reached forth and pulled toward him the second beast.

And then Bukawai, seeing the battle going against his forces, rushed forward from the cavern brandishing his knob-stick. Tarzan saw him coming, and rising now to both feet, a hyena in each hand, he hurled one of the foaming beasts straight at the witch-doctor's head. Down went the two in a snarling, biting heap. Tarzan tossed the second hyena across the crater, while the first gnawed at the rotting face of its master; but this did not suit the ape-man. With a kick he sent the beast howling after its companion, and springing to the side of the prostrate witch-doctor, dragged him to his feet.

Bukawai, still conscious, saw death, immediate and terrible, in the cold eyes of his captor, so he turned upon Tarzan with teeth and nails. The ape-man shuddered at the proximity of that raw face to his. The hyenas had had enough and disappeared through the small aperture leading into the cave. Tarzan had little difficulty in overpowering and binding Bukawai. Then he led him to the very tree to which he had been bound; but in binding Bukawai, Tarzan saw to it that escape after the same fashion that he had escaped would be out of the question; then he left him.

As he passed through the winding corridors and the subterranean apartments, Tarzan saw nothing of the hyenas.

"They will return," he said to himself.

In the crater between the towering walls Bukawai, cold with terror, trembled, trembled as with ague.

"They will return!" he cried, his voice rising to a fright-filled shriek.

And they did.

THE DENVER EXPRESS.

By A.A. Hayes

From: Project Gutenberg's Stories by American Authors, Volume 6, by Various

I.

Any one who has seen an outward-bound clipper ship getting under way and heard the "shanty-songs" sung by the sailors as they toiled at capstan and halliards, will probably remember that rhymeless but melodious refrain--

"I'm bound to see its muddy waters
Yeo ho! that rolling river;
Bound to see its muddy waters
Yeo ho! the wild Missouri."

Only a happy inspiration could have impelled Jack to apply the adjective "wild" to that ill-behaved and disreputable river, which, tipsily bearing its enormous burden of mud from the far North-west, totters, reels, runs its tortuous course for hundreds on hundreds of miles; and which, encountering the lordly and thus far well-behaved Mississippi at Alton, and forcing its company upon this splendid river (as if some drunken fellow should lock arms with a dignified pedestrian), contaminates it all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

At a certain point on the banks of this river, or rather--as it has the habit of abandoning and destroying said banks--at a safe distance therefrom, there is a town from which a railroad takes its departure for its long climb up the natural incline of the Great Plains, to the base of the mountains; hence the importance to this town of the large but somewhat shabby building serving as terminal station. In its smoky interior, late in the evening and not very long ago, a train was nearly ready to start. It was a train possessing a certain consideration. For the benefit of a public easily gulled and enamored of grandiloquent terms, it was advertised as the "Denver Fast Express;" sometimes, with strange unfitness, as the "Lightning Express"; "elegant" and "palatial" cars were declared to be included therein; and its departure was one of the great events of the twenty-four hours, in the country round about. A local poet described it in the "live" paper of the town, cribbing from an old Eastern magazine and passing off as original, the lines--

"Again we stepped into the street,
A train came thundering by,
Drawn by the snorting iron steed
Swifter than eagles fly.

Rumbled the wheels, the whistle shrieked,

Far rolled the smoky cloud,
Echoed the hills, the valleys shook,
The flying forests bowed."

The trainmen, on the other hand, used no fine phrases. They called it simply "Number Seventeen"; and, when it started, said it had "pulled out."

On the evening in question, there it stood, nearly ready. Just behind the great hissing locomotive, with its parabolic headlight and its coal-laden tender, came the baggage, mail, and express cars; then the passenger coaches, in which the social condition of the occupants seemed to be in inverse ratio to their distance from the engine. First came emigrants, "honest miners," "cow-boys," and laborers; Irishmen, Germans, Welshmen, Mennonites from Russia, quaint of garb and speech, and Chinamen. Then came long cars full of people of better station, and last the great Pullman "sleepers," in which the busy black porters were making up the berths for well-to-do travellers of diverse nationalities and occupations.

It was a curious study for a thoughtful observer, this motley crowd of human beings sinking all differences of race, creed, and habits in the common purpose to move Westward--to the mountain fastnesses, the sage-brush deserts, the Golden Gate.

The warning bell had sounded, and the fireman leaned far out for the signal. The gong struck sharply, the conductor shouted, "All aboard," and raised his hand; the tired ticket-seller shut his window, and the train moved out of the station, gathered way as it cleared the outskirts of the town, rounded a curve, entered on an absolutely straight line, and, with one long whistle from the engine, settled down to its work. Through the night hours it sped on, past lonely ranches and infrequent stations, by and across shallow streams fringed with cottonwood trees, over the greenish-yellow buffalo grass; near the old trail where many a poor emigrant, many a bold frontiersman, many a brave soldier, had laid his bones but a short time before.

Familiar as they may be, there is something strangely impressive about all night journeys by rail; and those forming part of an American transcontinental trip are almost weird. From the windows of a night-express in Europe, or the older portions of the United States, one looks on houses and lights, cultivated fields, fences, and hedges; and, hurled as he may be through the darkness, he has a sense of companionship and semi-security. Far different is it when the long train is running over those two rails which, seen before night set in, seemed to meet on the horizon. Within, all is as if between two great seaboard cities; the neatly dressed people, the uniformed officials, the handsome fittings, the various appliances for comfort. Without are now long, dreary levels, now deep and wild cañons, now an environment of strange

and grotesque rock-formations, castles, battlements, churches, statues. The antelope fleetly runs, and the coyote skulks away from the track, and the gray wolf howls afar off. It is for all the world, to one's fancy, as if a bit of civilization, a family or community, its belongings and surroundings complete, were flying through regions barbarous and inhospitable.

From the cab of Engine No. 32, the driver of the Denver Express saw, showing faintly in the early morning, the buildings grouped about the little station ten miles ahead, where breakfast awaited his passengers. He looked at his watch; he had just twenty minutes in which to run the distance, as he had run it often before. Something, however, travelled faster than he. From the smoky station out of which the train passed the night before, along the slender wire stretched on rough poles at the side of the track, a spark of that mysterious something which we call electricity flashed at the moment he returned the watch to his pocket; and in five minutes' time, the station-master came out on the platform, a little more thoughtful than his wont, and looked eastward for the smoke of the train. With but three of the passengers in that train has this tale specially to do, and they were all in the new and comfortable Pullman "City of Cheyenne." One was a tall, well-made man of about thirty--blond, blue-eyed, bearded, straight, sinewy, alert. Of all in the train he seemed the most thoroughly at home, and the respectful greeting of the conductor, as he passed through the car, marked him as an officer of the road. Such was he--Henry Sinclair, assistant engineer, quite famed on the line, high in favor with the directors, and a rising man in all ways. It was known on the road that he was expected in Denver, and there were rumors that he was to organize the parties for the survey of an important "extension." Beside him sat his pretty young wife. She was a New Yorker--one could tell at first glance--from the feather of her little bonnet, matching the gray travelling dress, to the tips of her dainty boots; and one, too, at whom old Fifth Avenue promenaders would have turned to look. She had a charming figure, brown hair, hazel eyes, and an expression at once kind, intelligent, and spirited. She had cheerfully left a luxurious home to follow the young engineer's fortunes; and it was well known that those fortunes had been materially advanced by her tact and cleverness.

The third passenger in question had just been in conversation with Sinclair, and the latter was telling his wife of their curious meeting. Entering the toilet-room at the rear of the car, he said, he had begun his ablutions by the side of another man, and it was as they were sluicing their faces with water that he heard the cry:

"Why, Major, is that you? Just to think of meeting you here!"

A man of about twenty-eight years of age, slight, muscular, wiry, had seized his wet hand and was wringing it. He had black eyes, keen and bright, swarthy complexion, black hair and mustache. A keen observer

might have seen about him some signs of a _jeunesse orageuse_, but his manner was frank and pleasing. Sinclair looked him in the face, puzzled for a moment.

"Don't you remember Foster?" asked the man.

"Of course I do," replied Sinclair. "For a moment I could not place you. Where have you been and what have you been doing?"

"Oh," replied Foster, laughing, "I've braced up and turned over a new leaf. I'm a respectable member of society, have a place in the express company, and am going to Denver to take charge."

"I am very glad to hear it, and you must tell me your story when we have had our breakfast."

The pretty young woman was just about to ask who Foster was, when the speed of the train slackened, and the brakeman opened the door of the car and cried out in stentorian tones:

"Pawnee Junction; twenty minutes for refreshments!"

* * * * *

II.

When the celebrated Rocky Mountain gold excitement broke out, more than twenty years ago, and people painted "PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST" on the canvas covers of their wagons and started for the diggings, they established a "trail" or "trace" leading in a south-westerly direction from the old one to California.

At a certain point on this trail a frontiersman named Barker built a forlorn ranch-house and _corral_, and offered what is conventionally called "entertainment for man and beast."

For years he lived there, dividing his time between fighting the Indians and feeding the passing emigrants and their stock. Then the first railroad to Denver was built, taking another route from the Missouri, and Barker's occupation was gone. He retired with his gains to St. Louis and lived in comfort.

Years passed on, and the "extension" over which our train is to pass was planned. The old pioneers were excellent natural engineers, and their successors could find no better route than they had chosen. Thus it was that "Barker's" became, during the construction period, an important point, and the frontiersman's name came to figure on time-tables.

Meanwhile the place passed through a process of evolution which would have delighted Darwin. In the party of engineers which first camped there was Sinclair, and it was by his advice that the contractors selected it for division headquarters. Then came drinking "saloons," and gambling-houses--alike the inevitable concomitant and the bane of Western settlements; then scattered houses and shops, and a shabby so-called hotel, in which the letting of miserable rooms (divided from each other by canvas partitions) was wholly subordinated to the business of the bar. Before long, Barker's had acquired a worse reputation than even other towns of its type, the abnormal and uncanny aggregations of squalor and vice which dotted the plains in those days; and it was at its worst when Sinclair returned thither and took up his quarters in the engineers' building. The passion for gambling was raging, and to pander thereto were collected as choice a lot of desperadoes as ever "stocked" cards or loaded dice. It came to be noticed that they were on excellent terms with a man called "Jeff" Johnson, who was lessee of the hotel; and to be suspected that said Johnson, in local parlance, "stood in with" them. With this man had come to Barker's his daughter Sarah, commonly known as "Sally," a handsome girl with a straight, lithe figure, fine features, reddish auburn hair, and dark blue eyes. It is but fair to say that even the "toughs" of a place like Barker's show some respect for the other sex, and Miss Sally's case was no exception to the rule. The male population admired her; they said she "put on heaps of style"; but none of them had seemed to make any progress in her good graces.

On a pleasant afternoon, just after the track had been laid some miles west of Barker's, and construction trains were running with some regularity to and from the end thereof, Sinclair sat on the rude veranda of the engineers' quarters, smoking his well-colored meerschaum and looking at the sunset. The atmosphere had been so clear during the day that glimpses were had of Long's and Pike's peaks, and as the young engineer gazed at the gorgeous cloud-display he was thinking of the miners' quaint and pathetic idea that the dead "go over the Range."

"Nice-looking, ain't it, Major?" asked a voice at his elbow, and he turned to see one of the contractors' officials taking a seat near him.

"More than nice-looking, to my mind, Sam," he replied. "What is the news to-day?"

"Nothin' much. There's a sight of talk about the doin's of them faro an' keno sharps. The boys is gittin' kind o' riled, fur they allow the game ain't on the square wuth a cent. Some of 'em down to the tie-camp wuz a-talkin' about a vigilance committee, an' I wouldn't be surprised ef they meant business. Hev yer heard about the young feller that come in a week ago from Laramie an' set up a new faro-bank?"

"No. What about him?"

"Wa'al, yer see he's a feller thet's got a lot of sand an' ain't afeared of nobody, an' he's allowed to hev the deal to his place on the square every time. Accordin' to my idee, gamblin's about the wust racket a feller kin work, but it takes all sorts of men to make a world, an' ef the boys is bound to hev a game, I calkilate they'd like to patronize his bank. Thet's made the old crowd mighty mad, an' they're a-talkin' about puttin' up a job of cheatin' on him an' then stringin' him up. Be sides, I kind o' think there's some cussed jealousy on another lay as comes in. Yer see the young feller--Cyrus Foster's his name--is sweet on thet gal of Jeff Johnson's. Jeff wuz to Laramie before he come here, an' Foster knowed Sally up thar. I allow he moved here to see her. Hello! Ef thar they ain't a-comin' now."

Down a path leading from the town, past the railroad buildings, and well on the prairie, Sinclair saw the girl walking with the "young feller." He was talking earnestly to her, and her eyes were cast down. She looked pretty and, in a way, graceful; and there was in her attire a noticeable attempt at neatness, and a faint reminiscence of by-gone fashions. A smile came to Sinclair's lips as he thought of a couple walking up Fifth Avenue during his leave of absence not many months before, and of a letter, many times read, lying at that moment in his breast-pocket.

"Papa's bark is worse than his bite," ran one of its sentences. "Of course he does not like the idea of my leaving him and going away to such dreadful and remote places as Denver and Omaha, and I don't know what else; but he will not oppose me in the end, and when you come on again--"

"By thunder!" exclaimed Sam; "ef thar ain't one of them cussed sharps a watchin' 'em."

Sure enough, a rough-looking fellow, his hat pulled over his eyes, half concealed behind a pile of lumber, was casting a sinister glance toward the pair.

"The gal's well enough," continued Sam; "but I don't take a cent's wuth of stock in thet thar father of her'n. He's in with them sharps, sure pop, an' it don't suit his book to hev Foster hangin' round. It's ten to one he sent that cuss to watch 'em. Wa'al, they're a queer lot, an' I'm afeared thar's plenty of trouble ahead among 'em. Good luck to you, Major," and he pushed back his chair and walked away.

After breakfast next morning, when Sinclair was sitting at the table in his office, busy with maps and plans, the door was thrown open, and Foster, panting for breath, ran in.

"Major Sinclair," he said, speaking with difficulty, "I've no claim on you, but I ask you to protect me. The other gamblers are going to hang me. They are more than ten to one. They will track me here, and unless

you harbor me, I'm a dead man."

Sinclair rose from his chair in a second and walked to the window. A party of men were approaching the building. He turned to Foster:

"I do not like your trade," said he; "but I will not see you murdered if I can help it. You are welcome here." Foster said "Thank you," stood still a moment, and then began to pace the room, rapidly clinching his hands, his whole frame quivering, his eyes flashing fire--"for all the world," Sinclair said, in telling the story afterward, "like a fierce caged tiger."

"My God!" he muttered, with concentrated intensity, "to be _trapped_, TRAPPED like this!"

Sinclair stepped quickly to the door of his bedroom, and motioned Foster to enter. Then there came a knock at the outer door, and he opened it and stood on the threshold, erect and firm. Half a dozen "toughs" faced him.

"Major," said their spokesman, "we want that man."

"You cannot have him, boys."

"Major, we're a-goin' to take him."

"You had better not try," said Sinclair, with perfect ease and self-possession, and in a pleasant voice. "I have given him shelter, and you can only get him over my dead body. Of course you can kill me, but you won't do even that without one or two of you going down; and then you know perfectly well, boys, what will happen. You _know_ that if you lay your finger on a railroad man it's all up with you. There are five hundred men in the tie-camp, not five miles away, and you don't need to be told that in less than one hour after they get word there won't be a piece of one of you big enough to bury."

The men made no reply. They looked him straight in the eyes for a moment. Had they seen a sign of flinching they might have risked the issue, but there was none. With muttered curses, they slunk away. Sinclair shut and bolted the door, then opened the one leading to the bedroom.

"Foster," he said, "the train will pass here in half an hour. Have you money enough?"

"Plenty, Major."

"Very well; keep perfectly quiet, and I will try to get you safely off." He went to an adjoining room and called Sam, the contractor's man. He

took in the situation at a glance.

"Wa'al, Foster," said he, "kind o' 'close call' for yer, warn't it? Guess yer'd better be gittin' up an' gittin' pretty lively. The train boys will take yer through, an' yer kin come back when this racket's worked out."

Sinclair glanced at his watch, then he walked to the window and looked out. On a small _mesa_, or elevated-plateau, commanding the path to the railroad, he saw a number of men with rifles.

"Just as I expected," said he. "Sam, ask one of the boys to go down to the track and, when the train arrives, tell the conductor to come here."

In a few minutes the whistle was heard, and the conductor entered the building. Receiving his instructions, he returned, and immediately on engine, tender, and platform appeared the trainmen, with _their_ rifles covering the group on the bluff. Sinclair put on his hat.

"Now, Foster," said he, "we have no time to lose. Take Sam's arm and mine, and walk between us."

The trio left the building and walked deliberately to the railroad. Not a word was spoken. Besides the men in sight on the train, two behind the window-blinds of the one passenger coach, and unseen, kept their fingers on the triggers of their repeating carbines. It seemed a long time, counted by anxious seconds, until Foster was safe in the coach.

"All ready, conductor," said Sinclair. "Now, Foster, good-by. I am not good at lecturing, but if I were you, I would make this the turning-point in my life."

Foster was much moved.

"I will do it, Major," said he; "and I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day. I am sure we shall meet again."

With another shriek from the whistle the train started. Sinclair and Sam saw the men quietly returning the firearms to their places as it gathered way. Then they walked back to their quarters. The men on the _mesa_, balked of their purpose, had withdrawn.

Sam accompanied Sinclair to his door, and then sententiously remarked: "Major, I think I'll light out and find some of the boys. You ain't got no call to know anything about it, but I allow it's about time them cusses was bounced."

Three nights after this, a powerful party of _Vigilantes_, stern and inexorable, made a raid on all the gambling dens, broke the tables and

apparatus, and conducted the men to a distance from the town, where they left them with an emphatic and concise warning as to the consequences of any attempt to return. An exception was made in Jeff Johnson's case--but only for the sake of his daughter--for it was found that many a "little game" had been carried on in his house.

Ere long he found it convenient to sell his business and retire to a town some miles to the eastward, where the railroad influence was not as strong as at Barker's. At about this time, Sinclair made his arrangements to go to New York, with the pleasant prospect of marrying the young lady in Fifth Avenue. In due time he arrived at Barker's with his young and charming wife and remained for some days. The changes were astounding. Common-place respectability had replaced abnormal lawlessness. A neat station stood where had been the rough contractor's buildings. At a new "Windsor" (or was it "Brunswick"?) the performance of the kitchen contrasted sadly (alas! how common is such contrast in these regions) with the promise of the _menu_. There was a tawdry theatre yclept "Academy of Music," and there was not much to choose in the way of ugliness between two "meeting-houses."

"Upon my word, my dear," said Sinclair to his wife, "I ought to be ashamed to say it, but I prefer Barker's _au naturel_."

One evening, just before the young people left the town, and as Mrs. Sinclair sat alone in her room, the frowsy waitress announced "a lady," and was requested to bid her enter. A woman came with timid mien into the room, sat down, as invited, and removed her veil. Of course the young bride had never known Sally Johnson, the whilom belle of Barker's, but her husband would have noticed at a glance how greatly she was changed from the girl who walked with Foster past the engineers' quarters. It would be hard to find a more striking contrast than was presented by the two women as they sat facing each other: the one in the flush of health and beauty, calm, sweet, self-possessed; the other still retaining some of the shabby finery of old days, but pale and haggard, with black rings under her eyes, and a pathetic air of humiliation.

"Mrs. Sinclair," she hurriedly began, "you do not know me, nor the like of me. I've got no right to speak to you, but I couldn't help it. Oh! please believe me, I am not real downright bad. I'm Sally Johnson, daughter of a man whom they drove out of the town. My mother died when I was little, and I _never_ had a show; and folks think because I live with my father, and he makes me know the crowd he travels with, that I must be in with them, and be of their sort. I never had a woman speak a kind word to me, and I've had so much trouble that I'm just drove wild, and like to kill myself; and then I was at the station when you came in, and I saw your sweet face and the kind look in your eyes, and it came in my heart that I'd speak to you if I died for it." She leaned eagerly forward, her hands nervously closing on the back of a chair. "I suppose your husband never told you of me; like enough he never knew me; but

I'll never forget him as long as I live. When he was here before, there was a young man "--here a faint color came in the wan cheeks--"who was fond of me, and I thought the world of him, and my father was down on him, and the men that father was in with wanted to kill him; and Mr. Sinclair saved his life. He's gone away, and I've waited and waited for him to come back--and perhaps I'll never see him again. But oh! dear lady, I'll never forget what your husband did. He's a good man, and he deserves the love of a dear good woman like you, and if I dared, I'd pray for you both, night and day."

She stopped suddenly and sank back in her seat, pale as before, and as if frightened by her own emotion. Mrs. Sinclair had listened with sympathy and increasing interest.

"My poor girl," she said, speaking tenderly (she had a lovely, soft voice) and with slightly heightened color, "I am delighted that you came to see me, and that my husband was able to help you. Tell me, can we not do more for you? I do not for one moment believe you can be happy with your present surroundings. Can we not assist you to leave them?"

The girl rose, sadly shaking her head. "I thank you for your words," she said. "I don't suppose I'll ever see you again, but I'll say, God bless you!"

She caught Mrs. Sinclair's hand, pressed it to her lips, and was gone.

Sinclair found his wife very thoughtful when he came home, and he listened with much interest to her story.

"Poor girl!" said he; "Foster is the man to help her. I wonder where he is? I must inquire about him."

The next day they proceeded on their way to San Francisco, and matters drifted on at Barker's much as before. Johnson had, after an absence of some months, come back and lived without molestation, amid the shifting population. Now and then, too, some of the older residents fancied they recognized, under slouched sombreros, the faces of some of his former "crowd" about the "Ranchman's Home," as his gaudy saloon was called.

Late on the very evening on which this story opens, and they had been "making up" the Denver Express in the train-house on the Missouri, "Jim" Watkins, agent and telegrapher at Barker's, was sitting in his little office, communicating with the station rooms by the ticket window. Jim was a cool, silent, efficient man, and not much given to talk about such episodes in his past life as the "wiping out" by Indians of the construction party to which he belonged, and his own rescue by the scouts. He was smoking an old and favorite pipe, and talking with one of "the boys" whose head appeared at the wicket. On a seat in the station sat a woman in a black dress and veil, apparently waiting for a train.

"Got a heap of letters and telegrams there, ain't year, Jim?" remarked the man at the window.

"Yes," replied Jim; "they're for Engineer Sinclair, to be delivered to him when he passes through here. He left on No. 17, to-night." The inquirer did not notice the sharp start of the woman near him.

"Is that good-lookin' wife of his'n a comin' with him?" asked he.

"Yes, there's letters for her, too."

"Well, good-night, Jim. See yer later," and he went out. The woman suddenly rose and ran to the window.

"Mr. Watkins," cried she, "can I see you for a few moments, where no one can interrupt us? It's a matter of life and death." She clutched the sill with her thin hands, and her voice trembled. Watkins recognized Sally Johnson in a moment. He unbolted a door, motioned her to enter, closed and again bolted it, and also closed the ticket window. Then he pointed to a chair, and the girl sat down and leaned eagerly forward.

"If they knew I was here," she said in a hoarse whisper, "my life wouldn't be safe five minutes. I was waiting to tell you a terrible story, and then I heard who was on the train due here to-morrow night. Mr. Watkins, don't, for God's sake, ask me how I found out, but I hope to die if I ain't telling you the living truth! They're going to wreck that train--No. 17--at Dead Man's Crossing, fifteen miles east, and rob the passengers and the express car. It's the worst gang in the country, _Perry's_. They're going to throw the train off the track the passengers will be maimed and killed,--and Mr. Sinclair and his wife on the cars! Oh! My God! Mr. Watkins, send them warning!"

She stood upright, her face deadly pale, her hands clasped. Watkins walked deliberately to the railroad map which hung on the wall and scanned it. Then he resumed his seat, laid his pipe down, fixed his eyes on the girl's face, and began to question her. At the same time his right hand, with which he had held the pipe, found its way to the telegraph key. None but an expert could have distinguished any change in the _clicking_ of the instrument, which had been almost incessant; but Watkins had "called" the head office on the Missouri. In two minutes the "sounder" rattled out "_All right! What is it_?"

Watkins went on with his questions, his eyes still fixed on the poor girl's face, and all the time his fingers, as it were, playing with the key. If he were imperturbable, so was _not_ a man sitting at a receiving instrument nearly five hundred miles away. He had "taken" but a few words when he jumped from his chair and cried:

"Shut that door, and call the superintendent and be quick! Charley, brace up--lively--and come and write this out!" With his wonderful electric pen, the handle several hundred of miles long, Watkins, unknown to his interlocutor, was printing in the Morse alphabet this startling message:

"Inform'n rec'd. Perry gang going to throw No. 17 off track near--xth mile-post, this division, about nine to-morrow (Thursday) night, kill passengers, and rob express and mail. Am alone here. No chance to verify story, but believe it to be on square. Better make arrangements from your end to block game. No Sheriff here now. Answer."

The superintendent, responding to the hasty summons, heard the message before the clerk had time to write it out. His lips were closely compressed as he put his own hand on the key and sent these laconic sentences: "_O.K. Keep perfectly dark. Will manage from this end_."

Watkins, at Barker's, rose from his seat, opened the door a little way, saw that the station was empty, and then said to the girl, brusquely, but kindly:

"Sally, you've done the square thing, and saved that train. I'll take care that you don't suffer and that you get well paid. Now come home with me, and my wife will look out for you."

"Oh! no," cried the girl, shrinking back, "I must run away. You're mighty kind, but I daren't go with you." Detecting a shade of doubt in his eye, she added: "Don't be afeared; I'll die before they'll know I've given them away to you!" and she disappeared in the darkness.

At the other end of the wire, the superintendent had quietly impressed secrecy on his operator and clerk ordered his fast mare harnessed, and gone to his private office.

"Read that!" said he to his secretary, "it was about time for some trouble of this kind, and now I'm going to let Uncle Sam take care of his mails. If I don't get to the reservation before the General's turned in, I shall have to wake him up. Wait for me, please."

The gray mare made the six miles to the military reservation in just half an hour. The General was smoking his last _cigar_, and was alert in an instant; and before the superintendent had finished the jorum of "hot Scotch" hospitably tendered, the orders had gone by wire to the commanding officer at Fort---, some distance east of Barker's, and been duly acknowledged.

Returning to the station, the superintendent remarked to the waiting secretary:

"The General's all right. Of course we can't tell that this is not a sell; but if those Perry hounds mean business they'll get all the fight they want; and if they've got any souls--which I doubt--may the Lord have mercy on them!"

He prepared several despatches, two of which were as follows:

"MR. HENRY SINCLAIR:

"On No. 17, Pawnee Junction:

This telegram your authority to take charge of train on which you are, and demand obedience of all officials and trainmen on road. Please do so, and act in accordance with information wired station agent at Pawnee Junction."

To the Station Agent:

"Reported Perry gang will try wreck and rob No. 17 near--xth mile-post. Denver Division, about nine Thursday night Troops will await train at Fort----. Car ordered ready for them. Keep everything secret, and act in accordance with orders of Mr. Sinclair."

"It's worth about ten thousand dollars," sententiously remarked he, "that Sinclair's on that train. He's got both sand and brains. Good-night," and he went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

III.

The sun never shone more brightly and the air was never more clear and bracing than when Sinclair helped his wife off the train at Pawnee Junction. The station-master's face fell as he saw the lady, but he saluted the engineer with as easy an air as he could assume, and watched for an opportunity to speak to him alone. Sinclair read the despatches with an unmoved countenance, and after a few minutes' reflection simply said: "All right. Be sure to keep the matter perfectly quiet." At breakfast he was _distract_--so much so that his wife asked him what was the matter. Taking her aside, he at once showed her the telegrams.

"You see my duty," he said. "My only thought is about you, my dear child. Will you stay here?"

She simply replied, looking into his face without a tremor:

"My place is with you." Then the conductor called "All aboard," and the train once more started.

Sinclair asked Foster to join him in the smoking-compartment and tell him the promised story, which the latter did. His rescue at Barker's, he frankly and gratefully said, had been the turning point in his life. In brief, he had "sworn-off" from gambling and drinking, had found honest employment, and was doing well.

"I've two things to do now, Major," he added; "first, I must show my gratitude, to you; and next--" he hesitated a little--"I want to find that poor girl that I left behind at Barker's. She was engaged to marry me, and when I came to think of it, and what a life I'd have made her lead, I hadn't the heart till now to look for her; but, seeing I'm on the right track, I'm going to find her, and get her to come with me. Her father's a--old scoundrel, but that ain't her fault, and I ain't going to marry him."

"Foster," quietly asked Sinclair, "do you know the Perry gang?"

The man's brow darkened.

"Know them?" said he. "I know them much too well. Perry is as ungodly a cutthroat as ever killed an emigrant in cold blood, and he's got in his gang nearly all those hounds that tried to hang me. Why do you ask, Major?"

Sinclair handed him the despatches. "You are the only man on the train to whom I have shown them," said he.

Foster read them slowly, his eyes lighting up as he did so. "Looks as if it was true," said he. "Let me see! Fort----. Yes, that's the--th infantry. Two of their boys were killed at Sidney last summer by some of the same gang, and the regiment's sworn vengeance. Major, if this story's on the square, that crowd's goose is cooked, and don't you forget it! I say, you must give me a hand in."

"Foster," said Sinclair, "I am going to put responsibility on your shoulders. I have no doubt that, if we be attacked, the soldiers will dispose of the gang; but I must take all possible precautions for the safety of the passengers. We must not alarm them. They can be made to think that the troops are going on a scout, and only a certain number of resolute men need be told of what we expect. Can you, late this afternoon, go through the cars, and pick them out? I will then put you in charge of the passenger cars, and you can post your men on the platforms to act in case of need. My place will be ahead."

"Major, you can depend on me," was Foster's reply. "I'll go through the train and have my eye on some boys of the right sort, and that's got

their shooting-irons with them."

Through the hours of that day on rolled the train, till over the crisp buffalo grass, across the well-worn buffalo trails, past the prairie-dog villages. The passengers chatted, dozed, played cards, read, all unconscious, with the exception of three, of the coming conflict between the good and the evil forces bearing on their fate; of the fell preparations making for their disaster; of the grim preparations making to avert such disaster; of all of which the little wires alongside of them had been talking back and forth. Watkins had telegraphed that he still saw no reason to doubt the good faith of his warning, and Sinclair had reported his receipt of authority and his acceptance thereof. Meanwhile, also, there had been set in motion a measure of that power to which appeal is so reluctantly made in time of peace. At Fort---, a lonely post on the plains, the orders had that morning been issued for twenty men under Lieutenant Halsey to parade at 4 P.M., with overcoats, two days' rations, and ball cartridges; also for Assistant Surgeon Kesler to report for duty with the party. Orders as to destination were communicated direct to the lieutenant from the post commander, and on the minute the little column moved, taking the road to the station. The regiment from which it came had been in active service among the Indians on the frontier for a long time, and the officers and men were tried and seasoned fighters. Lieutenant Halsey had been well known at the West Point balls as the "leader of the german." From the last of these balls he had gone straight to the field and three years had given him an enviable reputation for _sang froid_ and determined bravery. He looked every inch the soldier as he walked along the trail, his cloak thrown back and his sword tucked under his arm. The doctor, who carried a Modoc bullet in some inaccessible part of his scarred body, growled good-naturedly at the need of walking, and the men, enveloped in their army-blue overcoats, marched easily by fours. Reaching the station, the lieutenant called the agent aside and with him inspected, on a siding, a long platform on which benches had been placed and secured. Then he took his seat in the station and quietly waited, occasionally twisting his long blond mustache. The doctor took a cigar with the agent, and the men walked about or sat on the edge of the platform. One of them, who obtained a surreptitious glance at his silent commander, told his companions that there was trouble ahead for somebody.

"That's just the way the leftenant looked, boys," said he, "when we was laying for them Apaches that raided Jones's Ranch and killed the women and little children."

In a short time the officer looked at his watch, formed his men, and directed them to take their places on the seats of the car. They had hardly done so, when the whistle of the approaching train was heard. When it came up, the conductor, who had his instructions from Sinclair, had the engine detached and backed on the siding for the soldiers' which thus came between it and the foremost baggage-car, when the train

was again made up. As arranged, it was announced that the troops were to be taken a certain distance to join a scouting party, and the curiosity of the passengers was but slightly excited. The soldiers sat quietly in their seats, their repeating rifles held between their knees, and the officer in front. Sinclair joined the latter, and had a few words with him as the train moved on. A little later, when the stars were shining brightly overhead, they passed into the express-car, and sent for the conductor and other trainmen, and for Foster. In a few words Sinclair explained the position of affairs. His statement was received with perfect coolness, and the men only asked what they were to do.

"I hope, boys," said Sinclair, "that we are going to put this gang to-night where they will make no more trouble. Lieutenant Halsey will bear the brunt of the fight, and it only remains for you to stand by the interests committed to your care. Mr. Express Agent, what help do you want?" The person addressed, a good-natured giant, girded with a cartridge belt, smiled as he replied:

"Well, sir, I'm wearing a watch which the company gave me for standing off the James gang in Missouri for half an hour, when we hadn't the ghost of a soldier about. I'll take the contract, and welcome, to hold _this_ fort alone."

"Very well," said Sinclair. "Foster, progress have you made?"

"Major, I've got ten or fifteen as good men as ever drew a bead, and just red-hot for a fight."

"That will do very well. Conductor, give the trainmen the rifles from the baggage-car and let them act under Mr. Foster. Now, boys, I am sure you will do your duty. That is all."

From the next station Sinclair telegraphed "All ready" to the superintendent, who was pacing his office in much suspense. Then he said a few words to his brave but anxious wife, and walked to the rear platform. On it were several armed men, who bade him good-evening, and asked "when the fun was going to begin." Walking through the train, he found each platform similarly occupied, and Foster going from one to the other. The latter whispered as he passed him:

"Major, I found Arizona Joe, the scout, in the smokin'-car, and he's on the front platform. That lets me out, and although I know as well as you that there ain't any danger about that rear sleeper where the madam is, I ain't a-going to be far off from her." Sinclair shook him by the hand; then he looked at his watch. It was half-past eight. He passed through the baggage and express cars, finding in the latter the agent sitting behind his safe, on which lay two large revolvers. On the platform-car he found the soldiers and their commander, sitting silent and unconcerned as before. When Sinclair reached the latter and nodded, he

rose and faced the men, and his fine voice was clearly heard above the rattle of the train.

"Company, 'ten_tion_!" The soldiers straightened themselves in a second.

"With ball cartridge, _load_!" It was done with the precision of a machine. Then the lieutenant spoke, in the same clear, crisp tones that the troops had heard in more than one fierce battle.

"Men," said he, "in a few minutes the Perry gang, which you will remember, are going to try to run this train off the track, wound and kill the passengers, and rob the cars and the United States mail. It is our business to prevent them. Sergeant Wilson" (a gray-bearded non-commissioned officer stood up and saluted), "I am going on the engine. See that my orders are repeated. Now, men, aim low, and don't waste any shots." He and Sinclair climbed over the tender and spoke to the engine-driver.

"How are the air-brakes working?" asked Sinclair.

"First-rate."

"Then, if you slow down now, you could stop the train in a third of her length, couldn't you?"

"Easy, if you don't mind being shaken up a bit."

"That is good. How is the country about the--xth mile-post?"

"Dead level, and smooth."

"Good again. Now, Lieutenant Halsey, this is a splendid head-light, and we can see a long way with my night glass, I will have a--"

"--2d mile-post just passed," interrupted the engine-driver.

"Only one more to pass, then, before we ought to strike them. Now, lieutenant, I undertake to stop the train within a very short distance of the gang. They will be on both sides of the track no doubt; and the ground, as you hear, is quite level You will best know what to do."

The officer stepped back. "Sergeant," called he, "do you hear me plainly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have the men fix bayonets. When the train stops, and I wave my sword, let half jump off each side, run up quickly, and form line _abreast of the engine_ --not ahead."

"Jack," said Sinclair to the engine-driver, "is your hand steady?" The man held it up with a smile. "Good. Now, stand by your throttle and your air-brake. Lieutenant, better warn the men to hold on tight, and tell the sergeant to pass the word to the boys on the platforms, or they will be knocked off by the sudden stop. Now for a look ahead!" and he brought the binocular to his eyes.

The great parabolic head-light illuminated the track a long way in advance, all behind it being of course in darkness. Suddenly Sinclair cried out:

"The fools have a light there, as I am a living man; and there is a little red one near us. What can that be? All ready. Jack! By heavens! they have taken up two rails. Now, _hold on, all_! STOP HER!!"

The engine-driver shut his throttle-valve with a jerk. Then, holding hard by it, he sharply turned a brass handle. There was a fearful jolt--a grating--and the train's way was checked. The lieutenant, standing sidewise, had drawn his sword. He waved it, and almost before he could get off the engine, the soldiers were up and forming, still in shadow, while the bright light was thrown on a body of men ahead.

"Surrender, or you are dead men!" roared the officer. Curses and several shots were the reply. Then came the orders, quick and sharp:

"_Forward! Close rip! Double-quick! Halt_! FIRE!"

It was speedily over. Left on the car with the men, the old sergeant had said:

"Boys, you hear. It's that ---- Perry gang. Now, don't forget Larry and Charley that they murdered last year," and there had come from the soldiers a sort of fierce, subdued _growl_. The volley was followed by a bayonet charge, and it required all the officer's authority to save the lives even of those who "threw up their hands." Large as the gang was (outnumbering the troops), well armed and desperate as they were, every one was dead, wounded, or a prisoner when the men who guarded the train platforms ran up. The surgeon, with professional coolness, walked up to the robbers, his instrument case under his arm.

"Not much for me to do here, Lieutenant," said he. "That practice for Creedmoor is telling on the shooting. Good thing for the gang, too. Bullets are better than rope, and a Colorado jury will give them plenty of that."

Sinclair had sent a man to tell his wife that all was over. Then he ordered a fire lighted, and the rails relaid. The flames lit a strange scene as the passengers flocked up. The lieutenant posted men to keep

them back.

"Is there a telegraph station not far ahead Sinclair?" asked he. "Yes? All right." He drew a small pad from his pocket, and wrote a despatch to the post commander.

"Be good enough to send that for me," said he "and leave orders at Barker's for the night express eastward to stop for us, and to bring a posse to take care of the wounded and prisoners. And now, my dear Sinclair, I suggest that you get the passengers into the cars, and go on as soon as those rails are spiked. When they realize the situation, some of them will feel precious ugly, and you know we can't have any lynching."

Sinclair glanced at the rails and gave the word at once to the conductor and brakemen, who began vociferating, "All aboard!" Just then Foster appeared, an expression of intense satisfaction showing clearly on his face, in the firelight.

"Major," said he, "I didn't use to take much stock in special Providence, or things being ordered; but I'm darned if I don't believe in them from this day. I was bound to stay where you put me, but I was uneasy, and wild to be in the scrimmage; and, if I had been there, I wouldn't have taken notice of a little red light that wasn't much behind the rear platform when we stopped. When I saw there was no danger there, I ran back, and what do you think I found? There was a woman, in a dead faint, and just clutching a lantern that she had tied up in a red scarf, poor little thing! And, Major, it was Sally! It was the little girl that loved me out at Barker's, and has loved me and waited for me ever since! And when she came to, and knew me, she was so glad she 'most fainted away again; and she let on as it was her that gave away the job. And I took her into the sleeper, and the madam, God bless her!--she knew Sally before and was good to her--she took care of her, and is cheering her up. And now, Major, I'm going to take her straight to Denver, and send for a parson and get her married to me, and she'll brace up, sure pop."

The whistle sounded, and the train started. From the window of the "sleeper" Sinclair and his wife took their last look at the weird scene. The lieutenant, standing at the side of the track, wrapped in his cloak, caught a glimpse of Mrs. Sinclair's pretty face, and returned her bow. Then, as the car passed out of sight, he tugged at his mustache and hummed:

"Why, boys, why,
Should we be melancholy, boys,
Whose business 'tis to die?"

In less than an hour, telegrams having in the mean time been sent in

both directions, the train ran alongside the platform at Barker's; and; Watkins, inperturbable as usual, met Sinclair, and gave him his letters.

"Perry gang wiped out, I hear, Major," said he "Good thing for the country. That's a lesson the 'toughs' in these parts won't forget for a long time. Plucky girl that give 'em away, wasn't she. Hope she's all right."

"She is all right," said Sinclair, with a smile.

"Glad of that. By-the-way, that father of her'n passed in his checks to-night. He'd got one warning from the Vigilantes, and yesterday they found out he was in with this gang, and they was a-going for him; but when the telegram come, he put a pistol to his head and saved them all trouble. Good riddance to everybody, I say. The sheriff's here now, and is going east on the next train to get them fellows. He's got a big posse together, and I wouldn't wonder if they was hard to hold in, after the 'boys in blue' is gone."

In a few minutes the train was off, with its living freight--the just and the unjust, the reformed and the rescued, the happy and the anxious. With many of the passengers the episode of the night was already a thing of the past. Sinclair sat by the side of his wife, to whose cheeks the color had all come back; and Sally Johnson lay in her berth, faint still, but able to give an occasional smile to Foster. In the station on the Missouri the reporters were gathered about the happy superintendent, smoking his cigars, and filling their note-books with items. In Denver, their brethren would gladly have done the same, but Watkins failed to gratify them. He was a man of few words. When the train had gone, and a friend remarked:

"Hope they'll get through all right, now," he simply said:

"Yes, likely. Two shots don't 'most always go in the same hole." Then he went to the telegraph instrument. In a few minutes he could have told a story as wild as a Norse _saga_, but what he said, when Denver had responded, was only--

_"No. 17, fifty-five minutes late." _

RIGHT ALWAYS REMAINS RIGHT.

From The Project Gutenberg eBook, Sixty Folk-Tales from Exclusively Slavonic Sources, by Various, Translated by Albert Henry Wratislaw

There was once upon a time a huntsman, who had a son, who was also a huntsman. He sent his son into a foreign land, to look about him and learn something additional. Here he went into a tavern, where he found a stranger, with whom he entered into conversation. They told each other all the news, till they also began to talk about right and wrong. The stranger asserted that the greatest wrong could be made right for money. But the huntsman opined that right always remained right, and offered to bet three hundred dollars upon it, if the stranger would do the same.[5] The stranger was content therewith, and they agreed to ask three advocates the question at once. They went to the first advocate, and he said that it was possible to make wrong right for money. They then went to another. He also asserted that wrong could be made right for money. Finally, they went to a third. He also told them that wrong could be made right for money. They then went back again, and as they had been going about the whole day, it wasn't till late in the evening that they got to their tavern. The stranger then asked the huntsman whether he still disbelieved that the greatest wrong could be made right for money, and the huntsman replied that he should soon be obliged to believe it on the assertion of the three advocates, although he was very unwilling to do so. The stranger was willing to grant him his life if he consented to pay three hundred dollars; but as they were talking about it, in came a man who overpersuaded the stranger that he must needs abide by what they had previously agreed upon. He did not, however, do this, but only, with a red-hot iron, took his eyesight from him, and told him at the same time, that he would then and then only believe that right remained right in the world, when the huntsman regained his sight.

[5] This surely ought, from what transpires later in the story, to have run thus: 'To stake his life against three hundred dollars to be staked by the stranger.'

The huntsman entreated the host of the tavern to put him on the right road to the town. He put him on the road to the gallows, and went his way. When the huntsman had gone a little further, there was the end of the road, and he heard it strike eleven. He couldn't go any further, and remained lying where he was in hope that perhaps somebody would come there in the morning. After a short time he heard a clatter, and soon somebody came up; nor was it long before a second and a third arrived. These were three evil spirits, who quitted their bodies in the night time, and perpetrated all manner of villainy in the world. They began to talk together, and one said: 'To-day it is a year and a day since we were here together and related the good deeds that we had done during the year before. A

year has again elapsed, and it is therefore time that we should ascertain which of us has done the best action during the past year.' The first spoke, and said: 'I have deprived the inhabitants of the city of Ramul of their water supply; they can only be helped if somebody finds out what it is that stops up the spring.' 'What's that?' said the second; and the first replied: 'I have placed a great toad on the spring out of which the water at other times flowed; if that be removed, the water will spring up again as before.' The second said: 'I have caused the beauty of the princess of Sarahawsky to disappear, and herself to fade away to skin and bones; she cannot be helped until the silver nail, which hangs above her bed, be pulled out.' The third said: 'Yesterday I caused a person to be deprived of his eyesight with a red hot iron; he can only be helped by washing his eyes with the water that is in the well not far from this gallows.' It then struck twelve in the town, and the three disappeared at once, but the huntsman remembered all that he had heard, and rejoiced that it was in his power to regain his eyesight.

Early on the morrow he heard somebody passing by, and begged him to send him people from the town, to tell where the healing spring was. Then all manner of people came to him, but no one could show him the spring, save at length one old woman. He caused himself to be led thither, and as soon as he had washed his eyes in it, he immediately obtained his eyesight again.

He now asked the way to the city of Ramul, and went thither. As soon as he arrived, he told the town council that he would restore them their water. But plenty of people had been there already, and the city had spent a great deal of money upon them, yet no one had effected aught, so, as it had been all in vain, they intended to have nothing more to do with the matter. Well, he said that he would do it all for nothing, only they must give him some labourers to help him. It was done. When they had dug as far as the place where the pipes, through which the water used to flow, were laid into the spring, he sent all the workmen away and dug a little further himself, and behold! a toad, like a boiler, was sitting on the spring. He removed it, and immediately the water began to flow, and ere long all the fountains were filled with water. The citizens got up a grand banquet in his honour, and paid him a large sum of money for what he had done.

He then went on and came to Sarahawsky. Then in a short time he learnt that the princess was ill, just as he had heard, and that no physician was able to help her; moreover that the king had promised that the person who could cure her malady should obtain her to wife. He therefore equipped himself very handsomely, went to the king's palace, and there declared that he had come from a far country, and would cure the princess. The king replied to him that he had scarce

any hope left, but would nevertheless make the experiment with him. The huntsman said that he would fetch his medicine. He went out and bought all manner of sweet comfits, and then went to the princess. He gave her a first dose, and looked about to see in what part of her bed's head the silver nail was sticking. Early on the second day he came again, gave her again some of his medicine, took the opportunity of laying hold of the nail, and pulled it till it began to move. In the afternoon the princess felt that she was better. The third day he came again, and while the princess was taking the medicine, pulled again at the bed's head, pulled the nail clean out, and put it secretly into his pocket. At noon the princess was so far recovered, that she wanted to have her dinner, and the king invited the huntsman to a grand banquet. They settled when the wedding was to take place, but the huntsman considered that he must first go home.

And when he had got home, he went again to the tavern where he had lost the sight of his eyes, and the stranger was there also. They began to tell each other all the news, and the huntsman related what he had heard under the gallows; how he had discovered the water, and finally how he had regained the sight of his eyes, and said that the stranger must now believe that in the world right always remained right. The stranger marvelled exceedingly, and said that he would believe it.

After this the huntsman went on and came to his princess, and they had a grand wedding festival, which lasted a whole week. The stranger bethought himself that he, too, would go under the gallows; peradventure he might also hear some such things as the huntsman had heard, and might in consequence also obtain a princess to wife. And when the year had elapsed, he also went there. He heard it strike one, and in a short time he heard a clatter; then up came somebody again, and it wasn't long before a second and third arrived. They began to talk together, and one said: 'It cannot but be, that some one overheard us last year, and through that everything that we have done is ruined. Let us, therefore, make a careful search before we again recount to each other what we have done.' They immediately began to search, and found the stranger. They tore him into three pieces and hung them up on the three corners of the gallows.

When the old king died they took the huntsman for king, and if he has not died, he is reigning still at the present day, and firmly believes that in his realm right will always remain right.

THE DUN HORSE

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales, by
George Bird Grinnell

I.

Many years ago, there lived in the Pawnee tribe an old woman and her grandson, a boy about sixteen years old. These people had no relations and were very poor. They were so poor that they were despised by the rest of the tribe. They had nothing of their own; and always, after the village started to move the camp from one place to another, these two would stay behind the rest, to look over the old camp, and pick up anything that the other Indians had thrown away, as worn out or useless. In this way they would sometimes get pieces of robes, worn out moccasins with holes in them, and bits of meat.

Now, it happened one day, after the tribe had moved away from the camp, that this old woman and her boy were following along the trail behind the rest, when they came to a miserable old worn out dun horse, which they supposed had been abandoned by some Indians. He was thin and exhausted, was blind of one eye, had a bad sore back, and one of his forelegs was very much swollen. In fact, he was so worthless that none of the Pawnees had been willing to take the trouble to try to drive him along with them. But when the old woman and her boy came along, the boy said, "Come now, we will take this old horse, for we can make him carry our pack." So the old woman put her pack on the horse, and drove him along, but he limped and could only go very slowly.

II.

The tribe moved up on the North Platte, until they came to Court House Rock. The two poor Indians followed them, and camped with the others. One day while they were here, the young men who had been sent out to look for buffalo, came hurrying into camp and told the chiefs that a large herd of buffalo were near, and that among them was a spotted calf.

The Head Chief of the Pawnees had a very beautiful daughter, and when he heard about the spotted calf, he ordered his old crier to go about through the village, and call out that the man who killed the spotted calf should have his daughter for his wife. For a spotted robe is _ti-war'-uks-ti_--big medicine.

The buffalo were feeding about four miles from the village, and the

chiefs decided that the charge should be made from there. In this way, the man who had the fastest horse would be the most likely to kill the calf. Then all the warriors and the young men picked out their best and fastest horses, and made ready to start. Among those who prepared for the charge was the poor boy on the old dun horse. But when they saw him, all the rich young braves on their fast horses pointed at him, and said, "Oh, see; there is the horse that is going to catch the spotted calf;" and they laughed at him, so that the poor boy was ashamed, and rode off to one side of the crowd, where he could not hear their jokes and laughter.

When he had ridden off some little way, the horse stopped, and turned his head round, and spoke to the boy. He said, "Take me down to the creek, and plaster me all over with mud. Cover my head and neck and body and legs." When the boy heard the horse speak, he was afraid; but he did as he was told. Then the horse said, "Now mount, but do not ride back to the warriors, who laugh at you because you have such a poor horse. Stay right here, until the word is given to charge." So the boy stayed there.

And presently all the fine horses were drawn up in line and pranced about, and were so eager to go that their riders could hardly hold them in; and at last the old crier gave the word, "_Loo-ah_"--Go! Then the Pawnees all leaned forward on their horses and yelled, and away they went. Suddenly, away off to the right, was seen the old dun horse. He did not seem to run. He seemed to sail along like a bird. He passed all the fastest horses, and in a moment he was among the buffalo. First he picked out the spotted calf, and charging up alongside of it, "_U-ra-rish!"_ straight flew the arrow. The calf fell. The boy drew another arrow, and killed a fat cow that was running by. Then he dismounted and began to skin the calf, before any of the other warriors had come up. But when the rider got off the old dun horse, how changed he was! He pranced about and would hardly stand still near the dead buffalo. His back was all right again; his legs were well and fine; and both his eyes were clear and bright.

The boy skinned the calf and the cow that he had killed, and then he packed all the meat on the horse, and put the spotted robe on top of the load, and started back to the camp on foot, leading the dun horse. But even with this heavy load the horse pranced all the time, and was scared at everything he saw. On the way to camp, one of the rich young chiefs of the tribe rode up by the boy, and offered him twelve good horses for the spotted robe, so that he could marry the Head Chief's beautiful daughter; but the boy laughed at him and would not sell the robe.

Now, while the boy walked to the camp leading the dun horse, most of the warriors rode back, and one of those that came first to the village, went to the old woman, and said to her, "Your grandson has

killed the spotted calf." And the old woman said, "Why do you come to tell me this? You ought to be ashamed to make fun of my boy, because he is poor." The warrior said, "What I have told you is true," and then he rode away. After a little while another brave rode up to the old woman, and said to her, "Your grandson has killed the spotted calf." Then the old woman began to cry, she felt so badly because every one made fun of her boy, because he was poor.

Pretty soon the boy came along, leading the horse up to the lodge where he and his grandmother lived. It was a little lodge, just big enough for two, and was made of old pieces of skin that the old woman had picked up, and was tied together with strings of rawhide and sinew. It was the meanest and worst lodge in the village. When the old woman saw her boy leading the dun horse with the load of meat and the robes on it, she was very much surprised. The boy said to her, "Here, I have brought you plenty of meat to eat, and here is a robe, that you may have for yourself. Take the meat off the horse." Then the old woman laughed, for her heart was glad. But when she went to take the meat from the horse's back, he snorted and jumped about, and acted like a wild horse. The old woman looked at him in wonder, and could hardly believe that it was the same horse. So the boy had to take off the meat, for the horse would not let the old woman come near him.

III.

That night the horse spoke again to the boy and said, "_Wa-ti-hes Chah'-ra-rat wa-ta_. To-morrow the Sioux are coming--a large war party. They will attack the village, and you will have a great battle. Now, when the Sioux are drawn up in line of battle, and are all ready to fight, you jump on to me, and ride as hard as you can, right into the middle of the Sioux, and up to their Head Chief, their greatest warrior, and count _coup_ on him, and kill him, and then ride back. Do this four times, and count _coup_ on four of the bravest Sioux, and kill them, but don't go again. If you go the fifth time, may be you will be killed, or else you will lose me. _La-ku'-ta-chix_--remember." So the boy promised.

The next day it happened as the horse had said, and the Sioux came down and formed a line of battle. Then the boy took his bow and arrows, and jumped on the dun horse, and charged into the midst of them. And when the Sioux saw that he was going to strike their Head Chief, they all shot their arrows at him, and the arrows flew so thickly across each other that the sky became dark, but none of them hit the boy. And he counted _coup_ on the Chief, and killed him, and then rode back. After that he charged again among the Sioux, where they were gathered thickest, and counted _coup_ on their bravest warrior, and killed him. And then twice more, until he had gone four times as the horse had told him.

But the Sioux and the Pawnees kept on fighting, and the boy stood around and watched the battle. And at last he said to himself, "I have been four times and have killed four Sioux, and I am all right, I am not hurt anywhere; why may I not go again?" So he jumped on the dun horse, and charged again. But when he got among the Sioux, one Sioux warrior drew an arrow and shot. The arrow struck the dun horse behind the forelegs and pierced him through. And the horse fell down dead. But the boy jumped off, and fought his way through the Sioux, and ran away as fast as he could to the Pawnees. Now, as soon as the horse was killed, the Sioux said to each other, "This horse was like a man. He was brave. He was not like a horse." And they took their knives and hatchets, and hacked the dun horse and gashed his flesh, and cut him into small pieces.

The Pawnees and Sioux fought all day long, but toward night the Sioux broke and fled.

IV.

The boy felt very badly that he had lost his horse; and, after the fight was over, he went out from the village to where it had taken place, to mourn for his horse. He went to the spot where the horse lay, and gathered up all the pieces of flesh, which the Sioux had cut off, and the legs and the hoofs, and put them all together in a pile. Then he went off to the top of a hill near by, and sat down and drew his robe over his head, and began to mourn for his horse.

As he sat there, he heard a great wind storm coming up, and it passed over him with a loud rushing sound, and after the wind came a rain. The boy looked down from where he sat to the pile of flesh and bones, which was all that was left of his horse, and he could just see it through the rain. And the rain passed by, and his heart was very heavy, and he kept on mourning.

And pretty soon, came another rushing wind, and after it a rain; and as he looked through the driving rain toward the spot where the pieces lay, he thought that they seemed to come together and take shape, and that the pile looked like a horse lying down, but he could not see well for the thick rain.

After this, came a third storm like the others; and now when he looked toward the horse he thought he saw its tail move from side to side two or three times, and that it lifted its head from the ground. The boy was afraid, and wanted to run away, but he stayed.

And as he waited, there came another storm. And while the rain fell, looking through the rain, the boy saw the horse raise himself up on

his forelegs and look about. Then the dun horse stood up.

V.

The boy left the place where he had been sitting on the hilltop, and went down to him. When the boy had come near to him, the horse spoke and said, "You have seen how it has been this day; and from this you may know how it will be after this. But _Ti-ra'-wa_ has been good, and has let me come back to you. After this, do what I tell you; not any more, not any less." Then the horse said, "Now lead me off, far away from the camp, behind that big hill, and leave me there to-night, and in the morning come for me;" and the boy did as he was told.

And when he went for the horse in the morning, he found with him a beautiful white gelding, much more handsome than any horse in the tribe. That night the dun horse told the boy to take him again to the place behind the big hill, and to come for him the next morning; and when the boy went for him again, he found with him a beautiful black gelding. And so for ten nights, he left the horse among the hills, and each morning he found a different colored horse, a bay, a roan, a gray, a blue, a spotted horse, and all of them finer than any horses that the Pawnees had ever had in their tribe before.

Now the boy was rich, and he married the beautiful daughter of the Head Chief, and when he became older, he was made Head Chief himself. He had many children by his beautiful wife, and one day when his oldest boy died, he wrapped him in the spotted calf robe and buried him in it. He always took good care of his old grandmother, and kept her in his own lodge until she died. The dun horse was never ridden except at feasts, and when they were going to have a doctors' dance, but he was always led about with the Chief, wherever he went. The horse lived in the village for many years, until he became very old. And at last he died.

THE REINCARNATION OF TAMA

From: The Project Gutenberg eBook, Romances of Old Japan, by Yei Theodora Ozaki

"Felt within themselves the sacred
passion of the second life.
Hope the best, but hold the Present
fatal daughter of the Past.
Love will conquer at the last."

TENNYSON

N.B.--It is a common Japanese belief that the soul may be re-born more than once into this world. A Buddhist proverb says:

Oya-ko, is-sé
Fufu wa, ni-sé,
Shu ju wa, sansé.

Parent and child for one life;
Husband and wife for two lives;
Master and servant for three lives.

Under the strong provocation of the passions of love, loyalty and patriotism, the soul may be reincarnated as many as seven times. The hero Hirose, before Port Arthur in 1904, wrote a poem during the last moments of his life saying that he would return seven times to work for his country.

THE REINCARNATION OF TAMA

Many years ago in Yedo,[1] in the district of Fukagawa, there lived a rich timber merchant. He and his wife dwelt together in perfect accord, but though their business prospered and their wealth increased as the years went by, they were a disappointed couple, for by the time they had reached middle age they were still unblessed with children. This was a great grief to them, for the one desire of their lives was to have a child.

The merchant at last determined to make a pilgrimage to several temples in company with his wife, and to supplicate the gods for the long yearned-for joy of offspring. When the arduous tour was over they both went to a resort in the hills noted for its mineral springs, the woman hoping earnestly that the medicinal waters would improve her health and bring about the desired result.

A year passed and the merchant's wife at last gave birth to a daughter. Both parents rejoiced that the Gods had answered their prayers. They reared the child with great care, likening her to a precious gem held tenderly in both hands, and they named her Tama, the Jewel.

As an infant Tama gave promise of great beauty, and when she grew into girlhood she more than fulfilled that promise. Their friends all declared that they had never seen such loveliness, and people compared her to a morning-glory, besprinkled with dew and glowing with the freshness of a summer dawn.

She had a tiny mole on the side of her snowy neck. This was her sole and distinguishing blemish.

Tama, the Jewel, proved a gifted child. She acquired reading and the writing of hieroglyphics with remarkable facility, and in all her studies was in advance of girls of her own age. She danced with grace, and sang and played the _koto_ enchantingly, and she was also accomplished in the arts of flower-arrangement and the tea-ceremony.

When she reached the age of sixteen her parents thought it was time to seek a suitable bridegroom for her. Very early marriages were the custom of the day, and besides that her parents wished to see her happily established in life before they grew older. As she was the only child, her husband would become the adopted son, and thus the succession to the family would be secured. However, it proved exceedingly difficult to find anyone who would meet all their requirements.

Now it happened that near-by in a small house there lived a man by the name of Hayashi. He was a provincial _samurai_, but for some reason or other had left his Daimio's domain and settled in Yedo. His wife was long since dead, but he had an only son whom he educated in the refinements of the military class. The family was a poor one, for all _samurai_ were trained to hold poverty in high esteem; and to despise trade and money-making.

Both father and son led simple lives and eked out their small patrimony by giving lessons in the reading of the classics and in calligraphy, and by telling fortunes according to the Confucian system of divination. Both were respected by all who knew them for their learning and upright lives.

At the time this story opens the elder Hayashi had just died and the son, though only nineteen years of age, carried on his father's work.

The young man was strikingly handsome. Of the aristocratic type, with long dark eyes, aquiline features and a pale, cream-like complexion, he

attracted notice wheresoever he went, and though shabbily dressed he always bore himself with great dignity. He was a musician and played the flute with unusual skill, and the game of _go_[2] was his favourite pastime, a taste which made him very popular with older men.

He often passed the rich merchant's house and Tama, the Jewel, noticed the young man coming and going with his flute. Questioning her nurse, she learned all there was to know about his history, his poverty, his scholarly attainments, his skill as a musician and the recent sorrow he had sustained in the death of his father.

Besides being attracted by his good looks, the beautiful Tama's heart went out in sympathy to the young man in his misfortune and loneliness, and she asked her mother to invite him to the house as her music-master, so that they might play duets together--he performing on the flute to her accompaniment on the _koto_.

The mother consented, thinking the plan an excellent one, and the young _samurai_ became a frequent visitor in the merchant's house. Tama's father was delighted when Hayashi proved to be an expert at _go_, and often asked him to come and spend the evening. As soon as dinner was over the merchant would order the chequer-board to be brought and Hayashi was then invited to try his hand at a game.

In this way the intimacy deepened till by degrees the young man was treated like a trusted member of the family.

The young master and pupil thus meeting day by day, presently fell in love, for heart calls to heart when both are young and handsome and the bond of similar tastes cements the friendship. Choosing themes and songs expressive of love they communicated their sentiments to one another through the romantic medium of music, and the two instruments blended in perfect harmony, the _koto's_ accompaniment giving an ardent response to the plaintive melody of the young man's flute, which wailed forth the hopeless passion consuming his soul for the lovely maiden.

[Illustration: Tama's father was delighted when Hayashi proved to be an expert at _go_, and often asked him to come and spend the evening]

Tama's parents were totally unaware of all that was happening, but her nurse soon guessed the secret of the young couple. The woman, who loved her charge faithfully and devotedly, could not bear to see her unhappy, and foolishly helped the lovers to meet each other in secret. With these unexpected opportunities they pledged themselves to each other for all their lives to come, and tried to think of some way by which they could obtain the old people's consent to their marriage. But Hayashi guessed that the merchant was ambitious for his daughter, and knew that it was improbable that he would accept a son-in-law as poor and obscure as himself. So he postponed asking for her hand until it

was too late.

At this time a rich man whom Tama's parents deemed a suitable match for their daughter presented his proposals, and Tama was suddenly told that they approved of the marriage and that she must prepare for the bridal.

Tama was overwhelmed with despair. That day Hayashi had promised to come and play his favourite game with her father. The nurse contrived that the lovers should meet first, and then Tama told Hayashi of the alliance which had been arranged. Weeping, she insisted that an elopement was the only solution to their difficulties. He consented to escape to some distant place with her that very night. Gathering her in his arms he tried to still her sobbing, and Tama clung to him, declaring that she would die rather than be separated from him.

They were thus surprised by her mother, and their secret could no longer be concealed. Tama was taken from him gently but firmly and shut up like a prisoner in one room. The vigilance of the parents being in this manner rudely awakened, the mother never allowed the girl out of her sight, and Hayashi was peremptorily forbidden the house.

The young man, fearing the wrath of her parents, went to live in another part of the city, telling no one of his whereabouts.

Tama was inconsolable. She pined for her lover and soon fell ill. Her elaborate trousseau and the outfit for the bridal household was complete but the wedding ceremony had to be postponed.

Both parents became very anxious for, as the days went by, instead of getting better their daughter visibly wasted away and sometimes could not leave her bed, so weak did she become. To distract her mind they took her to places of amusement like the theatre, or to gardens noted for the blossoming of trees and flowers. Then finally they carried her to places like Hakone and Atami, hoping that the mineral baths and the change of air and scene would cure her. But it was all to no purpose, Tama grew worse in spite of the devotion lavished upon her. Seriously alarmed, the parents called in a doctor. He declared Tama's malady to be love-sickness, and said that unless she were united to the man she pined for that she might die.

Her mother now begged the father to allow the marriage with Hayashi to take place. Though he was not the man of their choice in worldly position, yet if their daughter loved him, it were better that she should marry him than that she should die.

But now arose a difficulty of which they had not dreamed. Hayashi had moved away no one knew whither, and all their frantic efforts to trace him were fruitless.

A year passed slowly by. When Tama was told that her parents had consented to her marrying her beloved, she brightened up with the hope of seeing him again, and appeared to regain her health for a short time. But as month followed month and he never came, the waiting and the sickening disappointment proved too much for the already weakened frame of the young girl. She drooped and died just as she had attained her seventeenth birthday.

It was springtime when the sad event occurred. Hayashi had never forgotten the beautiful girl nor the vows they had mutually plighted, and he swore never to accept another woman as his wife. He longed for news of Tama, but he realized how imprudent and blameable his conduct had been in entering into a secret love-affair with a young girl, and he feared that her father might kill him were he to return even for a single day to the vicinity. Weakly he told himself that she had in all probability forgotten him by this time and was surely married to the man of her parents' choice.

One fine morning he went fishing on the Sumida river. When evening began to fall he turned homewards. As he sauntered along the river embankment, the water lapping softly and dreamily at his feet, he was suddenly startled to see a girlish form coming towards him in the wavering shadows of declining day. Light as a summer zephyr she glided from under the arches of the blossom laden cherry-trees with the sunset flaming behind her. He remembered long afterward that she had seemed rather to float over the ground than to walk.

To his utter astonishment he at once recognized Tama, and his heart leapt with joy at sight of her. After the first salutations he looked at her closely and congratulated her on her good health and ever-increasing beauty. He then asked her to tell him all that had happened since they were cruelly parted.

In the saddest of tremulous voices Jewel answered: "After you left the house my old and devoted nurse was dismissed for having helped us to meet in secret. From that day to this I have never seen her, but she sent me word that she had returned to her old home."

"Then you are not married yet?" asked Hayashi, his heart beating wildly with hope as he interrupted her.

"Oh, no," replied Tama, looking at him strangely, "do you think that I could ever forget you? You are my betrothed forever, even after death. Do you not know that the dread of that marriage being forced upon me and my pining for you made me ill for a long time. Sympathizing with my unhappiness, my parents broke off my engagement and then tried to find you. But you had entirely disappeared leaving no trace behind. To-day I started out, resolved to find you with the help of my old nurse. I am on my way to her now. How happy I am to find you thus. Will

you not take me to your house and show me where you live?"

[Illustration: He was suddenly startled to see a girlish form coming towards him in the wavering shadows]

She then turned and walked with him as he led the way to their humble dwelling. Now that her parents had consented to her marrying him they need not wait long, he told himself. How fortunate he was that he should have gained such faithful and unchanging love as that of his beautiful Tama.

As they went along exchanging blissful confidences as to their undying love for one another, he told her of his oath never to wed another woman for her dear sake.

They entered the house together, the nearness of her sweet presence thrilling him to his finger-tips. Impatiently he knelt to light the lamp, placed ready on his low writing table, then with joy inexpressible at the anticipation of all that the future held for them, he turned to speak to her.

But to his utter bewilderment Tama was gone. He searched the house and garden, and with a lantern went and peered down the road, but she was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as she had appeared.

Hayashi thought the incident more than strange; it was eerie in the extreme. Returning alone to his empty room, he shivered as a chill of foreboding seemed to penetrate his whole being, withering as with an icy breath the newly awakened impulses of hope and longing. A thousand recollections of his love crowded upon him, and kept him tossing uneasily upon his pillow all through the night. With the first break of dawn he was no longer able to control his feverish anxiety for news of her, and rising hurriedly, he at once set out for Fukagawa.

Eagerly he hastened to the house of an old friend to make inquiries regarding the merchant's family and especially about Tama. To his dismay he learned that she had passed away but a few days before, and listened with an aching heart to the account of her long illness. And he knew that she had died for love of him.

He returned to his home stupefied with grief and tormented with self-reproach.

"Oh, Tama! Tama! My love!" he cried aloud in his anguish, as he threw himself down in his room and gave way to his despair. "Had I but known of your illness I would have come to you. It was your spirit that appeared to me yesterday. Oh! come to me again! Tama! Tama!"

For weeks he was ill, but when he recovered and was able to think collectedly, he could not endure to live longer in such a world of misery. He felt that he was responsible for the untimely death of the young girl. To escape from the insupportable sorrows of life he decided to enter a Buddhist monastery, and joined the order of itinerant monks called Komuso.^[3]

Like the monks in the middle ages in Europe the Komuso enjoyed sanctuary. They were chiefly samurai who wished to hide their identity. Sometimes a breach of the law, such as the killing of a friend, obliged the samurai to cut the ties which bound him to his Daimio; sometimes a family blood-feud forced him to spend his years in tracking down his enemy; sometimes it was disgust of the world, sorrow or disappointment, as in the case of Hayashi: these various reasons often caused men to bury themselves out of remembrance in the remote life of these wandering monks.

The Komuso were always treated with great respect, they enjoyed the hospitality of inns and ships, and a free pass unquestioned across all government barriers.

They wore the stole but not the cassock, and they did not shave their heads like the priesthood. They were distinguished by their strange headgear, which was a wicker basket worn upside down, reaching as far as the chin and completely hiding the face. The rules of their order forbade them to marry, to eat meat, or to drink more than three cups of wine, and when on duty they might not take off their hats or bow to anyone, even to their parents. Outside these restrictions, though nominally priests, their lives were practically those of laymen, and when not on service they spent their time much as they liked in practising the military arts or in study.

As a mental discipline the Komuso were under obligation to go out daily to beg for alms, holding a bowl to receive whatever was bestowed upon them. They affected flute playing. This instrument was cut from the stem nearest the root, the strongest part of the bamboo, and was thus able to serve a double purpose. It gave the monk, who carried nothing with him, the means of earning his daily food, and when necessary was used as a weapon in self-defence.

Hayashi, being skilful with his flute, chose the life of the Komuso as being the best suited to him.

Before leaving Tokyo he visited the temple where his lost love was buried and knelt before her tomb. He dedicated his whole life to praying for the repose of her soul and for a happier rebirth. Her kaimyo (death-name) he inscribed on heavy paper, and wheresoever he went he carried this in a fold of his robe where it crossed his breast. It was, and still is, the custom of the Komuso to perform upon the

flute as a devotional exercise at religious services.

As each year came round he always made his way to some tranquil spot and rested from his penitential wanderings on the anniversary of the death of Tama.

Staying in an isolated room he then set up her *_kaimyo_* in the alcove, and placing an incense burner before it, kindled the fragrant sticks and kept them alight from sunrise to sunset. Kneeling before this temporary altar he took out his flute, and pouring the passionate breath of his soul into the plaintive, quivering notes, he reverently offered the music to her sweet and tender spirit, remembering the delight she had always taken in those melodies before the blossom of their love had been defrauded of its fruit of consummation by the blighting blast of interference.

[Illustration: Hayashi visits the temple where his lost love was buried, and dedicates his whole life to praying for the repose of her soul.]

And gradually, as time went by, the burden of sorrow and the tumult of remorse slipped from his soul, and peace and serenity, the aftermath of suffering, came to him at last.

He roamed all over the country for many years, and finally his journeyings brought him to the mountainous province of Koshu. It was nightfall when he reached the district and he lost his way in the darkness. Worn out with fatigue, he began to wonder where he should pass the night, for no houses were to be seen far or near, and everywhere about him there was nothing but a heaping of hills and a wild loneliness.

For hours he strayed about, when at last, peering into the gloom far up on the mountain side, a solitary light gleamed through the heavy mists. Greatly relieved he hastened towards it.

As soon as he knocked at the outer door of the cottage a ferocious looking man appeared. When the stranger asked for a night's shelter he morosely and silently showed him into the single room which, flanked by a small kitchen, comprised the whole dwelling. Hayashi, furtively gazing round him, noticed that there were no industrial implements to be seen, but that in one corner were standing a sword and a gun.

The host clapped his hands. In answer to the call a young girl of about fifteen years of age appeared. He ordered her to bring the brazier and some food for the guest. Then arming himself with his weapons, he left the house.

The damsel waited on Hayashi attentively, and as she went to and fro

from the kitchen she often glanced appealingly at him. Her attitude was that of one frightened in submission, and Hayashi wondered how she came to be there, for, though begrimed with work, he could see that she was fair and comely, and her deportment was superior to her surroundings.

When they were left alone the girl came and knelt before him, and bursting into tears sobbed out "Whoever you may be I warn you to escape while there is yet time. That man whose hospitality you have accepted is a brigand and he will probably kill you in the hope of plunder."

Hayashi, with his heart full of compassion for the young girl, asked her how it was that she came to be living in so wild and desolate a place, and the tale she told him was a pitiful one of wrong.

"My home is in the next province," she said, as she wiped away the tears with her sleeve. "Just after my father's death this robber entered our house and demanded money of my mother. As she had none to give him he carried me away, intending to sell me into slavery. Soon after he brought me to this house, he was wounded on a marauding expedition, and has since been confined to the house for a month. Thus it is that you find me here still. But he is now recovered and able to go out once more. I implore you to take me with you, otherwise I shall never see my mother again and my fate will be unendurable."

Being of a chivalrous nature Hayashi's heart burned within him at the sad plight of the little maid, and catching her up he fled out of the robber's den into the night.

After some time, when well away from the place, he set her down and they walked steadily all night. By dawn they had crossed the boundary of Kosshu and entered the neighbouring province. Once on the high road the district was familiar to the girl and she gladly led the way to her own home.

The delight of the sorrowing mother on finding her kidnapped child restored to her was great and unrestrained. She fell at his feet in a passion of gratitude and thanked him again and again.

In the meantime the rescued girl came to thank her deliverer. Hayashi gazed at her in astonishment. Her appearance had undergone an extraordinary transformation. No longer the forlorn, neglected drudge of the day before, a beautiful girl stood before him. And wonder of wonders! She was the living image of what his lost Tama had been years ago. The tide of the past swept over him with its bitter-sweet memories, leaving him speechless and racked with the storm of his feelings. Not only was the likeness forcibly striking, but he also beheld a little mark, the exact replica of the one he so well remembered on Tama's snowy neck.

He had thought that in the long years of hardship and renunciation of the joys of life the tragic love of his youth lay buried, but the shock of the unmistakable resemblance left him trembling.

In a few minutes he was able to control his emotion and the power of speech returned to him.

"Tell me," he said, turning to the mother, "have you not some relatives in Tokyo? Your daughter is like one whom I knew many years ago, but who is now dead."

The woman regarded him searchingly and after a few moments of this close scrutiny, she inquired:

"Are you not Hayashi who lived in Fukagawa fifteen years ago?"

He was startled by the suddenness of the question, which showed that his identity was revealed and that she knew of his past. He did not answer but searched his brain, wondering who the woman could possibly be.

Seeing his embarrassment she continued, now and again wiping the tears from her eyes: "When you came to the house I thought that your voice was in some way quite familiar to me, but you are so disguised in your present garb that at first I could not recall who you were.

"Fifteen years ago I served in the house of the rich timber merchant in Fukagawa and often helped O Tama San[4] to meet you in secret, for I felt great sympathy with you both, and if a day passed without her being able to see you, Oh! she was very unhappy. Her parents were furious at the unwise part I had played and I was summarily dismissed. I returned home and was almost immediately married. Within a year I gave birth to a little daughter. The child bore a striking resemblance to my late mistress and I gave her the name of Jewel in remembrance of the beloved charge I had nursed and tended for so many years. As she grew older not only her face and figure, but her voice and her movements all vividly recalled O Tama San. Is not this an affinity of a previous existence that my child should be saved by you who loved the first Tama?"

Then Hayashi, who had listened with rapt attention to the woman's strange story, asked her the date of the infant's birth.

Marvellous to relate it was the very day and hour, for ever indelibly engraven on his memory, that Tama, his first love, had appeared to him on the bank of the Sumida river in the springtide fifteen years ago.

When he told her of this uncanny meeting the woman said that she believed her daughter, the second Tama, to be the re-incarnation of

the first Tama. The apparition he had seen was the spirit of his love who had thus announced her rebirth into the world to him. There could be no doubt of this, for had not Tama told him herself that she was on her way to her old nurse. So strong was the affinity that bound them to each other that it had drawn Tama from the spirit-land back to this earth.

"Remember the old proverb, _the karma-relation is deep_, " she added in conclusion.

Later on she besought Hayashi to marry the second Tama, for she believed that only in this way would the soul of the first Tama find rest.

But Hayashi, thinking that the great difference in their present ages was an obstacle to a happy union, refused on the score that he was too old and sad a man to make such a young bride happy. He decided, however, to stay on in the little household for a while, and to give any possible comfort and help to the old nurse whose loyal devotion to her mistress had figured so prominently and fatefully in his past.

Thus several months elapsed, bringing with them great and radical changes in the land. The Restoration came to pass, and the new regime was established with the Emperor instead of the Shogun at the helm of State. Schools were founded all over the country, and amongst many other old institutions the order of the _Komuso_ monks, to which Hayashi belonged, was abolished by an edict of State.

Hayashi, during his stay in the village, had won his way into the hearts of the people and they now begged him to remain as teacher in the new school, a position for which he was peculiarly fitted by the classical education he had received from his father. He consented to the proposition which solved the problem of his future, for under the new laws it was forbidden him to return to his old life.

The mayor of the place was also much attracted by Hayashi's superior character and dignity, and learning of the sad and romantic history of his past, and believing, as all Japanese do, in predestined affinities, persuaded him that it was his fate, nay more, a debt he owed to the past, to marry Tama, the second, the re-incarnation of his first love.

The marriage proved a blessed one. The house of Hayashi prospered from that day forth and as children were born to them the joy of their lives was complete.

[Footnote 1: The old name for Tokyo.]

[Footnote 2: _Go_, a game played with black and white counters--more complicated than chess.]

[Footnote 3: The sect was introduced from China in the Kamakura epoch (1200-1400), but it never became popular in the land of its adoption. Under the Tokugawa Government (1700-1850) the _Komuso_ were used as national detectives, but the privileges they enjoyed led to the abuse of the order by bad men, and it was abolished at the time of the Restoration. Later on the edict was rescinded, and these men in their strange headgear may be seen to this day fluting their way about the old city of Kyoto.]

[Footnote 4: In speaking women use the polite forms of speech, whereas men drop them. The "O" is the honorific prefix to a woman's name and "San" or "Sama" is the equivalent of Mr. Mrs. or Miss according to the gender of the name. Nowadays high-class women drop the "O" before their individual names, but add "Ko" after them. For instance, the name O Tama San would now be Tama-Ko San.]

JOSEPH: A STORY

By Katherine Rickford

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Best Psychic Stories, by Various

They were sitting round the fire after dinner--not an ordinary fire--one of those fires that has a little room all to itself with seats at each side of it to hold a couple of people or three.

The big dining room was paneled with oak. At the far end was a handsome dresser that dated back for generations. One's imagination ran riot when one pictured the people who must have laid those pewter plates on the long, narrow, solid table. Massive medieval chests stood against the walls. Arms and parts of armor hung against the panelling; but one noticed few of these things, for there was no light in the room save what the fire gave.

It was Christmas Eve. Games had been played. The old had vied with the young at snatching raisins from the burning snapdragon. The children had long since gone to bed; it was time their elders followed them, but they lingered round the fire, taking turns at telling stories. Nothing very weird had been told; no one had felt any wish to peep over his shoulder or try to penetrate the darkness of the far end of the room; the omission caused a sensation of something wanting. From each one there this thought went out, and so a sudden silence fell upon the party. It was a girl who broke it--a mere child; she wore her hair up that night for the first time, and that seemed to give her the right to sit up so late.

"Mr. Grady is going to tell one," she said.

All eyes were turned to a middle-aged man in a deep armchair placed straight in front of the fire. He was short, inclined to be fat, with a bald head and a pointed beard like the beards that sailors wear. It was plain that he was deeply conscious of the sudden turning of so much strained yet forceful thought upon himself. He was restless in his chair as people are in a room that is overheated. He blinked his eyes as he looked round the company. His lips twitched in a nervous manner. One side of him seemed to be endeavoring to restrain another side of him from a feverish desire to speak.

"It was this room that made me think of him," he said thoughtfully.

There was a long silence, but it occurred to no one to prompt him. Every one seemed to understand that he was going to speak, or rather that something inside him was going to speak, some force that craved expression and was using him as a medium.

The little old man's pink face grew strangely calm, the animation that usually lit it was gone. One would have said that the girl who had

started him already regretted the impulse, and now wanted to stop him. She was breathing heavily, and once or twice made as though she would speak to him, but no words came. She must have abandoned the idea, for she fell to studying the company. She examined them carefully, one by one. "This one," she told herself, "is so-and-so, and that one there just another so-and-so." She stared at them, knowing that she could not turn them to herself with her stare. They were just bodies kept working, so to speak, by some subtle sort of sentry left behind by the real selves that streamed out in pent-up thought to the little old man in the chair in front of the fire.

"His name was Joseph; at least they called him Joseph. He dreamed, you understand--dreams. He was an extraordinary lad in many ways. His mother--I knew her very well--had three children in quick succession, soon after marriage; then ten years went by and Joseph was born. Quiet and reserved he always was, a self-contained child whose only friend was his mother. People said things about him, you know how people talk. Some said he was not Clara's child at all, but that she had adopted him; others, that her husband was not his father, and these put her change of manner down to a perpetual struggle to keep her husband comfortably in the dark. I always imagined that the boy was in some way aware of all this gossip, for I noticed that he took a dislike to the people who spread it most."

The little man rested his elbows on the arms of his chair and let the tips of his fingers meet in front of him. A smile played about his mouth. He seemed to be searching among his reminiscences for the one that would give the clearest portrait of Joseph.

"Well, anyway," he said at last, "the boy was odd, there is no gainsaying the fact. I suppose he was eleven when Clara came down here with her family for Christmas. The Coningtons owned the place then--Mrs. Conington was Clara's sister. It was Christmas Eve, as it is now, many years ago. We had spent a normal Christmas Eve; a little happier, perhaps, than usual by reason of the family re-union and because of the presence of so many children. We had eaten and drank, laughed and played and gone to bed.

"I woke in the middle of the night from sheer restlessness. Clara, knowing my weakness, had given me a fire in my room. I lit a cigarette, played with a book, and then, purely from curiosity, opened the door and looked down the passage. From my door I could see the head of the staircase in the distance; the opposite wing of the house, or the passage rather beyond the stairs, was in darkness. The reason I saw the staircase at all was that the window you pass coming downstairs allowed the moon to throw an uncertain light upon it, a weird light because of the stained glass. I was arrested by the curious effect of this patch of light in so much darkness when suddenly someone came into it, turned, and went downstairs. It was just like a scene in a theater; something

was about to happen that I was going to miss. I ran as I was, barefooted, to the head of the stairs and looked over the banister. I was excited, strung up, too strung up to feel the fright that I knew must be with me. I remember the sensation perfectly. I knew that I was afraid, yet I did not feel fright.

"On the stairs nothing moved. The little hall down here was lost in darkness. Looking over the banister I was facing the stained glass window. You know how the stairs run around three sides of the hall; well, it occurred to me that if I went halfway down and stood under the window I should be able to keep the top of the stairs in sight and see anything that might happen in the hall. I crept down very cautiously and waited under the window. First of all, I saw the suit of empty armor just outside the door here. You know how a thing like that, if you stare at it in a poor light, appears to move; well, it moved sure enough, and the illusion was enhanced by clouds being blown across the moon. By the fire like this one can talk of these things rationally, but in the dead of night it is a different matter, so I went down a few steps to make sure of that armor, when suddenly something passed me on the stairs. I did not hear it, I did not see it, I sensed it in no way, I just knew that something had passed me on its way upstairs. I realized that my retreat was cut off, and with the knowledge fear came upon me.

"I had seen someone come down the stairs; that, at any rate, was definite; now I wanted to see him again. Any ghost is bad enough, but a ghost that one can see is better than one that one can't. I managed to get past the suit of armor, but then I had to feel my way to these double doors here."

He indicated the direction of the doors by a curious wave of his hand. He did not look toward them nor did any of the party. Both men and women were completely absorbed in his story; they seemed to be mesmerized by the earnestness of his manner. Only the girl was restless; she gave an impression of impatience with the slowness with which he came to his point. One would have said that she was apart from her fellows, an alien among strangers.

"So dense was the darkness that I made sure of finding the first door closed, but it was not, it was wide open, and, standing between them, I could feel that the other was open, too. I was standing literally in the wall of the house, and as I peered into the room, trying to make out some familiar object, thoughts ran through my mind of people who had been bricked up in walls and left there to die. For a moment I caught the spirit of the inside of a thick wall. Then suddenly I felt the sensation I have often read about but never experienced before: I knew there was some one in the room. You are surprised, yes, but wait! I knew more: I knew that some one was conscious of my presence. It occurred to me that whoever it was might want to get out of the door. I made room for him to pass. I waited for him, made sure of him, began to feel

giddy, and then a man's voice, deep and clear:

"There is some one there; who is it?"

"I answered mechanically, 'George Grady.'

"I'm Joseph.'

"A match was drawn across a matchbox, and I saw the boy bending over a candle waiting for the wick to catch. For a moment I thought he must be walking in his sleep, but he turned to me quite naturally and said in his own boyish voice:

"Lost anything?"

"I was amazed at the lad's complete calm. I wanted to share my fright with some one, instead I had to hide it from this boy. I was conscious of a curious sense of shame. I had watched him grow, taught him, praised him, scolded him, and yet here he was waiting for an explanation of my presence in the dining room at that odd hour of the night.

"Soon he repeated the question, 'Lost anything?'

"No,' I said, and then I stammered, 'Have you?'

"No,' he said with a little laugh. 'It's that room, I can't sleep in it.'

"Oh,' I said. 'What's the matter with the room?'

"It's the room I was killed in,' he said quite simply.

"Of course I had heard about his dreams, but I had had no direct experience of them; when, therefore, he said that he had been killed in his room I took it for granted that he had been dreaming again. I was at a loss to know quite how to tackle him; whether to treat the whole thing as absurd and laugh it off as such, or whether to humor him and hear his story. I got him upstairs to my room, sat him in a big armchair, and poked the fire into a blaze.

"You've been dreaming again,' I said bluntly.

"Oh, no I haven't. Don't you run away with that idea.'

"His whole manner was so grown up that it was quite unthinkable to treat him as the child he really was. In fact, it was a little uncanny, this man in a child's frame.

"I was killed there,' he said again.

"How do you mean, killed?" I asked him.

"Why, killed--murdered. Of course it was years and years ago, I can't say when; still I remember the room. I suppose it was the room that reminded me of the incident.'

"Incident?" I exclaimed.

"What else? Being killed is only an incident in the existence of any one. One makes a fuss about it at the time, of course, but really when you come to think of it....'

"Tell me about it,' I said, lighting a cigarette. He lit one too, that child, and began.

"You know my room is the only modern one in this old house. Nobody knows why it is modern. The reason is obvious. Of course it was made modern after I was killed there. The funny thing is that I should have been put there. I suppose it was done for a purpose, because I--I----'

"He looked at me so fixedly I knew he would catch me if I lied.

"What?" I asked.

"Dream.'

"Yes,' I said, 'that is why you were put there.'

"I thought so, and yet of all the rooms--but then, of course, no one knew. Anyhow I did not recognize the room until after I was in bed. I had been asleep some time and then I woke suddenly. There is an old wheel-back chair there--the only old thing in the room. It is standing facing the fire as it must have stood the night I was killed. The fire was burning brightly, the pattern of the back of the chair was thrown in shadow across the ceiling. Now the night I was murdered the conditions were exactly the same, so directly I saw that pattern on the ceiling I remembered the whole thing. I was not dreaming, don't think it, I was not. What happened that night was this: I was lying in bed counting the parts of the back of that chair in shadow on the ceiling. I probably could not get to sleep, you know the sort of thing, count up to a thousand and remember in the morning where you got to. Well, I was counting those pieces when suddenly they were all obliterated, the whole back became a shadow, some one was sitting in the chair. Now, surely, you understand that directly I saw the shadow of that chair on the ceiling to-night I realized that I had not a moment to lose. At any moment that same person might come back to that same chair and escape would be impossible. I slipped from my bed as quickly as I could and ran downstairs.'

"But were you not afraid,' I asked, 'downstairs?'

"That she might follow me? It was a woman, you know. No, I don't think I was. She does not belong downstairs. Anyhow she didn't.'

"No,' I said. 'No.'

"My voice must have been out of control, for he caught me up at once.

"You don't mean to say you saw her?' he said vehemently.

"Oh, no.'

"You felt her?'

"She passed me as I came downstairs,' I said.

"What can I have done to her that she follows me so?' He buried his face in his hands as though searching for an answer to his thought. Suddenly he looked up and stared at me.

"Where had I got to? Oh yes, the murder. I can remember how startled I was to see that shadow in the chair--startled, you know, but not really frightened. I leaned up in bed and looked at the chair, and sure enough a woman was sitting in it--a young woman. I watched her with a profound interest until she began to turn in her chair, as I felt, to look at me; when she did that I shrank back in bed. I dared not meet her eyes. She might not have had eyes, she might not have had a face. You know the sort of pictures that one sees when one glances back at all one's soul has ever thought.

"I got back in the bed as far as I could and peeped over the sheets at the shadow on the ceiling. I was tired; frightened to death; I grew weary of watching. I must have fallen asleep, for suddenly the fire was almost out, the pattern of the chair barely discernible, the shadow had gone. I raised myself with a sense of huge relief. Yes, the chair was empty, but, just think of it, the woman was on the floor, on her hands and knees, crawling toward the bed.

"I fell back stricken with terror.

"Very soon I felt a gentle pull at the counterpane. I thought I was in a nightmare but too lazy or too comfortable to try to wake myself from it. I waited in an agony of suspense, but nothing seemed to be happening, in fact I had just persuaded myself that the movement of the counterpane was fancy when a hand brushed softly over my knee. There was no mistaking it, I could feel the long, thin fingers. Now was the time to do something. I tried to rouse myself, but all my efforts were

futile, I was stiff from head to foot.

"Although the hand was lost to me, outwardly, it now came within my range of knowledge, if you know what I mean. I knew that it was groping its way along the bed feeling for some other part of me. At any moment I could have said exactly where it had got to. When it was hovering just over my chest another hand knocked lightly against my shoulder. I fancied it lost, and wandering in search of its fellow.

"I was lying on my back staring at the ceiling when the hands met; the weight of their presence brought a feeling of oppression to my chest. I seemed to be completely cut off from my body; I had no sort of connection with any part of it, nothing about me would respond to my will to make it move.

"There was no sound at all anywhere.

"I fell into a state of indifference, a sort of patient indifference that can wait for an appointed time to come. How long I waited I cannot say, but when the time came it found me ready. I was not taken by surprise.

"There was a great upward rush of pent-up force released; it was like a mighty mass of men who have been lost in prayer rising to their feet. I can't remember clearly, but I think the woman must have got on to my bed. I could not follow her distinctly, my whole attention was concentrated on her hands. At the time I felt those fingers itching for my throat.

"At last they moved; slowly at first, then quicker; and then a long-drawn swish like the sound of an over-bold wave that has broken too far up the beach and is sweeping back to join the sea.'

"The boy was silent for a moment, then he stretched out his hand for the cigarettes.

"You remember nothing else?' I asked him.

"No,' he said. 'The next thing I remember clearly is deliberately breaking the nursery window because it was raining and mother would not let me go out.'"

There was a moment's tension, then the strain of listening passed and every one seemed to be speaking at once. The Rector was taking the story seriously.

"Tell me, Grady," he said. "How long do you suppose elapsed between the boy's murder and his breaking the nursery window?"

But a young married woman in the first flush of her happiness broke in between them. She ridiculed the whole idea. Of course the boy was dreaming. She was drawing the majority to her way of thinking when, from the corner where the girl sat, a hollow-sounding voice:

"And the boy? Where is he?"

The tone of the girl's voice inspired horror, that fear that does not know what it is it fears; one could see it on every face; on every face, that is, but the face of the bald-headed little man; there was no horror on his face; he was smiling serenely as he looked the girl straight in the eyes.

"He's a man now," he said.

"Alive?" she cried.

"Why not?" said the little old man, rubbing his hands together.

She tried to rise, but her frock had got caught between the chairs and pulled her to her seat again. The man next her put out his hand to steady her, but she dashed it away roughly. She looked round the party for an instant for all the world like an animal at bay, then she sprang to her feet and charged blindly. They crowded round her to prevent her falling; at the touch of their hands she stopped. She was out of breath as though she had been running.

"All right," she said, pushing their hands from her. "All right. I'll come quietly. I did it."

They caught her as she fell and laid her on the sofa watching the color fade from her face.

The hostess, an old woman with white hair and a kind face, approached the little old man; for once in her life she was roused to anger.

"I can't think how you could be so stupid," she said. "See what you have done."

"I did it for a purpose," he said.

"For a purpose?"

"I have always thought that girl was the culprit. I have to thank you for the opportunity you have given me of making sure."

THE MEN IN THE STORM

from: The Project Gutenberg eBook, The Open Boat and Other Stories, by Stephen Crane

The blizzard began to swirl great clouds of snow along the streets, sweeping it down from the roofs, and up from the pavements, until the faces of pedestrians tingled and burned as from a thousand needle-prickings. Those on the walks huddled their necks closely in the collars of their coats, and went along stooping like a race of aged people. The drivers of vehicles hurried their horses furiously on their way. They were made more cruel by the exposure of their position, aloft on high seats. The street cars, bound up town, went slowly, the horses slipping and straining in the spongy brown mass that lay between the rails. The drivers, muffled to the eyes, stood erect, facing the wind, models of grim philosophy. Overhead trains rumbled and roared, and the dark structure of the elevated railroad, stretching over the avenue, dripped little streams and drops of water upon the mud and snow beneath.

All the clatter of the street was softened by the masses that lay upon the cobbles, until, even to one who looked from a window, it became important music, a melody of life made necessary to the ear by the dreariness of the pitiless beat and sweep of the storm. Occasionally one could see black figures of men busily shovelling the white drifts from the walks. The sounds from their labour created new recollections of rural experiences which every man manages to have in a measure. Later, the immense windows of the shops became aglow with light, throwing great beams of orange and yellow upon the pavement. They were infinitely cheerful, yet in a way they accentuated the force and discomfort of the storm, and gave a meaning to the pace of the people and the vehicles, scores of pedestrians and drivers, wretched with cold faces, necks and feet, speeding for scores of unknown doors and entrances, scattering to an infinite variety of shelters, to places which the imagination made warm with the familiar colours of home.

There was an absolute expression of hot dinners in the pace of the people. If one dared to speculate upon the destination of those who came trooping, he lost himself in a maze of social calculation; he might fling a handful of sand and attempt to follow the flight of each particular grain. But as to the suggestion of hot dinners, he was in firm lines of thought, for it was upon every hurrying face. It is a matter of tradition; it is from the tales of childhood. It comes forth with every storm.

However, in a certain part of a dark west-side street, there was a collection of men to whom these things were as if they were not. In this street was located a charitable house, where for five cents the homeless of the city could get a bed at night, and in the morning coffee and bread.

During the afternoon of the storm, the whirling snows acted as drivers, as men with whips, and at half-past three the walk before the closed doors of the house was covered with wanderers of the street, waiting. For some distance on either side of the place they could be seen lurking in the doorways and behind projecting parts of buildings, gathering in close bunches in an effort to get warm. A covered wagon drawn up near the curb sheltered a dozen of them. Under the stairs that led to the elevated railway station, there were six or eight, their hands stuffed deep in their pockets, their shoulders stooped, jiggling their feet. Others always could be seen coming, a strange procession, some slouching along with the characteristic hopeless gait of professional strays, some coming with hesitating steps, wearing the air of men to whom this sort of thing was new.

It was an afternoon of incredible length. The snow, blowing in twisting clouds, sought out the men in their meagre hiding-places, and skilfully beat in among them, drenching their persons with showers of fine stinging flakes. They crowded together, muttering, and fumbling in their pockets to get their red inflamed wrists covered by the cloth.

New-comers usually halted at one end of the groups and addressed a question, perhaps much as a matter of form, "Is it open yet?"

Those who had been waiting inclined to take the questioner seriously and became contemptuous. "No; do yeh think we'd be standin' here?"

The gathering swelled in numbers steadily and persistently. One could always see them coming, trudging slowly through the storm.

Finally, the little snow plains in the street began to assume a leaden hue from the shadows of evening. The buildings upreared gloomily save where various windows became brilliant figures of light, that made shimmers and splashes of yellow on the snow. A street lamp on the curb struggled to illuminate, but it was reduced to impotent blindness by the swift gusts of sleet crusting its panes.

In this half-darkness, the men began to come from their shelter places and mass in front of the doors of charity. They were of all types, but the nationalities were mostly American, German, and Irish. Many were strong, healthy, clear-skinned fellows, with that stamp of countenance which is not frequently seen upon seekers after charity. There were men of undoubted patience, industry, and temperance, who, in time of ill-fortune, do not habitually turn to rail at the state of society, snarling at the arrogance of the rich, and bemoaning the cowardice of the poor, but who at these times are apt to wear a sudden and singular meekness, as if they saw the world's progress marching from them, and were trying to perceive where they had failed, what they had lacked, to be thus vanquished in the race. Then there were others of the shifting, Bowery element, who were used to paying ten cents for a place to sleep,

but who now came here because it was cheaper.

But they were all mixed in one mass so thoroughly that one could not have discerned the different elements, but for the fact that the labouring men, for the most part, remained silent and impassive in the blizzard, their eyes fixed on the windows of the house, statues of patience.

The sidewalk soon became completely blocked by the bodies of the men. They pressed close to one another like sheep in a winter's gale, keeping one another warm by the heat of their bodies. The snow came down upon this compressed group of men until, directly from above, it might have appeared like a heap of snow-covered merchandise, if it were not for the fact that the crowd swayed gently with a unanimous, rhythmical motion. It was wonderful to see how the snow lay upon the heads and shoulders of these men, in little ridges an inch thick perhaps in places, the flakes steadily adding drop and drop, precisely as they fall upon the unresisting grass of the fields. The feet of the men were all wet and cold, and the wish to warm them accounted for the slow, gentle, rhythmical motion. Occasionally some man whose ear or nose tingled acutely from the cold winds would wriggle down until his head was protected by the shoulders of his companions.

There was a continuous murmuring discussion as to the probability of the doors being speedily opened. They persistently lifted their eyes towards the windows. One could hear little combats of opinion.

"There's a light in th' winder!"

"Naw; it's a reflection f'm across th' way."

"Well, didn't I see 'em light it?"

"You did?"

"I did!"

"Well, then, that settles it!"

As the time approached when they expected to be allowed to enter, the men crowded to the doors in an unspeakable crush, jamming and wedging in a way that it seemed would crack bones. They surged heavily against the building in a powerful wave of pushing shoulders. Once a rumour flitted among all the tossing heads.

"They can't open th' door! Th' fellers er smack up agin 'em."

Then a dull roar of rage came from the men on the outskirts; but all the time they strained and pushed until it appeared to be impossible

for those that they cried out against to do anything but be crushed into pulp.

"Ah, git away f'm th' door!"

"Git outa that!"

"Throw 'em out!"

"Kill 'em!"

"Say, fellers, now, what th' 'ell? G've 'em a chance t' open th' door!"

"Yeh dam pigs, give 'em a chance t' open th' door!"

Men in the outskirts of the crowd occasionally yelled when a boot-heel of one of trampling feet crushed on their freezing extremities.

"Git off me feet, yeh clumsy tarrier!"

"Say, don't stand on me feet! Walk on th' ground!"

A man near the doors suddenly shouted--"O-o-oh! Le' me out--le' me out!" And another, a man of infinite valour, once twisted his head so as to half face those who were pushing behind him. "Quit yer shovin', yeh"--and he delivered a volley of the most powerful and singular invective, straight into the faces of the men behind him. It was as if he was hammering the noses of them with curses of triple brass. His face, red with rage, could be seen upon it, an expression of sublime disregard of consequences. But nobody cared to reply to his imprecations; it was too cold. Many of them snickered, and all continued to push.

In occasional pauses of the crowd's movement the men had opportunities to make jokes; usually grim things, and no doubt very uncouth. Nevertheless, they were notable--one does not expect to find the quality of humour in a heap of old clothes under a snow-drift.

The winds seemed to grow fiercer as time wore on. Some of the gusts of snow that came down on the close collection of heads, cut like knives and needles, and the men huddled, and swore, not like dark assassins, but in a sort of American fashion, grimly and desperately, it is true, but yet with a wondrous under-effect, indefinable and mystic, as if there was some kind of humour in this catastrophe, in this situation in a night of snow-laden winds.

Once the window of the huge dry-goods shop across the street furnished material for a few moments of forgetfulness. In the brilliantly-lighted space appeared the figure of a man. He was rather stout and very well

clothed. His beard was fashioned charmingly after that of the Prince of Wales. He stood in an attitude of magnificent reflection. He slowly stroked his moustache with a certain grandeur of manner, and looked down at the snow-encrusted mob. From below, there was denoted a supreme complacency in him. It seemed that the sight operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own delightful environment.

One of the mob chanced to turn his head, and perceived the figure in the window. "Hello, lookit 'is whiskers," he said genially.

Many of the men turned then, and a shout went up. They called to him in all strange keys. They addressed him in every manner, from familiar and cordial greetings, to carefully-worded advice concerning changes in his personal appearance. The man presently fled, and the mob chuckled ferociously, like ogres who had just devoured something.

They turned then to serious business. Often they addressed the stolid front of the house.

"Oh, let us in fer Gawd's sake!"

"Let us in, or we'll all drop dead!"

"Say, what's th' use o' keepin' us poor Indians out in th' cold?"

And always some one was saying, "Keep off my feet."

The crushing of the crowd grew terrific toward the last. The men, in keen pain from the blasts, began almost to fight. With the pitiless whirl of snow upon them, the battle for shelter was going to the strong. It became known that the basement door at the foot of a little steep flight of stairs was the one to be opened, and they jostled and heaved in this direction like labouring fiends. One could hear them panting and groaning in their fierce exertion.

Usually some one in the front ranks was protesting to those in the rear--"O-o-ow! Oh, say now, fellers, let up, will yeh? Do yeh wanta kill somebody!"

A policeman arrived and went into the midst of them, scolding and be-rating, occasionally threatening, but using no force but that of his hands and shoulders against these men who were only struggling to get in out of the storm. His decisive tones rang out sharply--"Stop that pushin' back there! Come, boys, don't push! Stop that! Here you, quit yer shovin'! Cheese that!"

When the door below was opened, a thick stream of men forced a way down the stairs, which were of an extraordinary narrowness, and seemed only wide enough for one at a time. Yet they somehow went down almost three

abreast. It was a difficult and painful operation. The crowd was like a turbulent water forcing itself through one tiny outlet. The men in the rear, excited by the success of the others, made frantic exertions, for it seemed that this large band would more than fill the quarters, and that many would be left upon the pavements. It would be disastrous to be of the last, and accordingly men with the snow biting their faces, writhed and twisted with their might. One expected that from the tremendous pressure, the narrow passage to the basement door would be so choked and clogged with human limbs and bodies that movement would be impossible. Once indeed the crowd was forced to stop, and a cry went along that a man had been injured at the foot of the stairs. But presently the slow movement began again, and the policeman fought at the top of the flight to ease the pressure of those that were going down.

A reddish light from a window fell upon the faces of the men, when they, in turn, arrived at the last three steps, and were about to enter. One could then note a change of expression that had come over their features. As they stood thus upon the threshold of their hopes, they looked suddenly contented and complacent. The fire had passed from their eyes and the snarl had vanished from their lips. The very force of the crowd in the rear, which had previously vexed them, was regarded from another point of view, for it now made it inevitable that they should go through the little doors into the place that was cheery and warm with light.

The tossing crowd on the sidewalk grew smaller and smaller. The snow beat with merciless persistence upon the bowed heads of those who waited. The wind drove it up from the pavements in frantic forms of winding white, and it seethed in circles about the huddled forms passing in one by one, three by three, out of the storm.

NOT ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE

by Mary Stewart Cutting

The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Wit and Humor of America, Volume VIII, by Various

"Haven't you any coffee spoons, Kitty? I thought you had a couple of dozen when you went to housekeeping."

Marcia, with her sleeves rolled up from her round white arms, was rummaging in the sideboard, as she knelt beside it on the floor, her brown eyes peering into the corners.

"Yes, of course I have coffee spoons. Aren't they there? I'm sure I don't know _what_ becomes of things."

Young Mrs. Fosdyke, stout and matronly, held a fat and placid year-old baby on her lap with one arm, while with the other hand she lunged out intermittently to pick up a much-chewed rubber dog cast upon the floor by the infant. "Oh, now I remember; they're at the bank, with the rest of the silver--we sent them there the summer we went to the seashore, and forgot to take them out again. I know it's dreadful to get in the habit of living in this picnic fashion; I'm ashamed sometimes to have any one come here. Not that I mind your having asked Mrs. Devereaux for Thanksgiving, Marcia; I don't want you to feel that way for a minute. I think it was nice of you to want to. If _you_ don't mind having her here, I'm sure I don't. You know I've had such a time changing servants; and when you have three babies--"

Mrs. Fosdyke was accustomed to anticipate possible astonishment at the size of her young family by stating tersely to begin with that the three were all of the same age; if this were not literally true, it was true enough to account for the disposal of most of her time. In a small house, on a small income, with one maid, all departments can not receive attention; under such circumstances something has to go. Mrs. Fosdyke's attention went, rightly enough, to the children; there were no graces of management left for the household--there couldn't be; that was one reason why she never invited company any more. She felt apologetic even before her sister.

"I wish things were a little nicer here--but I know just how you feel about Mrs. Devereaux. No matter how rich a person is, it seems sort of desolate to be alone at a hotel in a small town on a holiday--Thanksgiving Day especially. And she was so good to you in Paris. I shall never forget it."

"I'm sure I never shall," said Marcia.

She saw with retrospective vision the scene of two years ago, when she, a terrified girl of twenty, just recovering from an illness, had missed

connections with her party at a railway station, and had been blessedly taken in charge by a stranger whose spoken name carried recognition with it to any American abroad. Marcia had been taken to Mrs. Devereaux's luxurious house for the day, put to bed, comforted, telegrams and messages sent hither and thither to her friends; truly it was the kind of a thing one does not forget, that must claim gratitude forever.

She went on now: "I can't get over our meeting in the street here in this place, just the day we both came--the strangest coincidence! I could hardly believe my eyes. And then to drive back to her rooms with her and find myself telling her all I've been doing, just as if I had known her always--I'm sure, though, I feel as if I had. I do want to do something for her so much--it doesn't make any real difference, her being so rich and grand. And then I thought of our Thanksgiving dinner, and she seemed so pleased, and accepted at once. Of course she stipulated that we were to promise not to make any difference on her account, but I do want to have everything as pretty and characteristic as possible. And you needn't bother a bit about anything, Kitty. I'll do all the work, and there's a whole week to get ready in. We'll have Frank bring your wedding silver from the bank; you had so many lovely large pieces."

"I had ten cut glass and silver loving cups," annotated Kitty, in the tone of injury the recollection always produced in the light of her present needs. "It will take you hours and days to clean all those things, Marcia; that's why I never use them. When you have three babies all the same age--"

"Kersley will help me," said Marcia, deftly introducing another subject.

"Kersley!" There was deep surprise in Kitty's voice; she turned to fix her eyes on her sister. Marcia flushed independently of her will.

"Yes--didn't I tell you? He's coming out to his brother's over Thanksgiving."

"Oh!" said Kitty, with significance; she made a precipitate lunge for the rubber dog. There was an alert tone in her voice when she spoke again:

"Marcia."

"Well?"

"How long is this thing to go on? Are you engaged to Kersley Battersby, or are you not? For if you're not, I don't think it's decent to keep him dangling on in this way any longer."

"Oh, Kitty, do stop!" Marcia ceased her investigations to relapse into a

jumbled heap on the rug, her chin resting on her hand, her dark, vivacious little face tense. "I suppose I do consider that I'm engaged, if you will have me say it; he's the only man I could ever care for, but I'm not going to let him know it, not until he gets on his feet--not while he's only making fifteen dollars here and twenty dollars there, and some weeks not even that, painting labels for tomato cans and patent medicines. It does seem a pity that, after all the studying in Paris and winning the prize for his portraits in the Salon, it should take him so long to get a start here. I suppose you have to have a 'pull,' as in everything else. If he once knew that I really cared for him he'd lose his head and want to be married out of hand. I couldn't do a thing with him. He'd insist that it would help him to work if I were near all the time."

"Perhaps it would," suggested Kitty.

"Yes, and have all his family say that I've ruined his prospects--you can imagine how pleasant that would be! Everyone says that if a poor artist is hampered at the beginning he has no career at all. I enjoy things as they are, anyway, and if Kersley doesn't it's his own lookout. He's a perfect baby, great, big, blue-eyed, ridiculous, unpractical thing! What do you suppose he did when he was in Chester last month, just after I'd left there? Walked all the way into town and back, twenty miles--he hadn't enough money for his car fare--to buy me a little trumpery pin I wanted, when they had the identical thing on sale at the little shop by the station! Wasn't that like him? And with all his artistic talent, I have to tell him what kind of a necktie to get. Imagine him, with his hair, in a scarlet one, when he looks so adorable in dull blue. Let's change the subject. Is this your best centerpiece, with the color all washed out?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll finish that lace one I'm making and put yellow under it. Yellow is to be the color scheme, Kitty. I'm going to present you with some of those lovely glasses I saw at Ketterer's, with gilt flowers on them. I want you to let me pay for the chrysanthemums and all the extras--a few palms can be hired; they add so much to the effect. You know I got the money for those illustrations yesterday, and I don't care whether I have any clothes or not. I just want to do my prettiest for a Thanksgiving for Mrs. Devereaux."

"Very well, dear," said Kitty.

"I should think that woman wouldn't want such a time made over her," said Mr. Fosdyke to his wife, disgustedly, in private. There are married men who may on occasion be mistaken for bachelors, but Mr. Fosdyke was not of that ilk; the respectable bondage of one wedded to family claims was stamped upon him as with a die, in spite of a humorous tendency that

was sometimes trying to his wife. "What's the sense? With all her millions she must be used to everything. I should think she'd like something plain and homelike for a change, instead of all this fuss and feathers. I'm worn out with it already. There seems to be a perfect upheaval downstairs, with all Marcia's decorations and color schemes and 'artistic effects.' My arm's broken lugging loving cups home from the bank--they weigh a ton. Why can't Mrs. Devereaux take us as we are?"

"Now, Frank, I've told you how Marcia feels about it," said his wife, reprovingly. "You know how intense she is--it gives her positive satisfaction to show her gratitude by working her fingers off and spending all the money she's got. She wants to make it a special occasion."

"Well, she's doing it," said Frank Fosdyke, with, however, a relenting smile; he was fond of whole-souled little Marcia. "I say, though, Kitty, what's Kersley doing here all the time? I thought he was living in New York. I can't go anywhere that I don't see that big smile of his and the gray suit. I'm always running across him with Marcia. It makes me feel like a fool. Am I to treat them as if they were engaged, or not?"

Mrs. Fosdyke shook her head. "Not yet."

"Can't he stop her shillyshallying?"

"Frank, I said 'Not yet.'"

"All right," said Frank, resignedly, moving around the darkened room, as he disrobed, with the catlike step of one whose ever haunting fear is that he may wake the baby.

Marcia had decreed against the old-fashioned, middle-of-the-day Thanksgiving dinner; half-past seven was early enough. "And it ought to be eight," she added, ruefully. "At any rate, the babies will be asleep, and Mrs. Fogarty is going to let her Maggie come and sit upstairs with them. Thank goodness, Ellen can cook the dinner, with my help, and wait on the table afterward. She's as nice and interested as she can be, and I'll keep her in good humor. I've promised to buy her a lovely new cap and apron. We've just decided what to have for the nine courses."

"_Nine courses!_"

"Now, Kitty, it's no more trouble to have nine courses than two, if you manage properly. I'll make a number of the dishes the day before, and Ellen can see to the turkey herself; I'll show you my bill of fare afterward. I'm going to have the loveliest little menu cards, with golden pumpkins in wheat sheaves painted on them--so nice and Thanksgivingy! You've seen the yellow paper cases I've made for the ice pudding, and the candle shades--the color scheme, you know, is yellow.

I'm going to ornament the dishes for the almonds and raisins and olives and the candied ginger and other things in the same way. Now, please don't worry about anything, Kitty! If people only make the arrangements beforehand, it's no trouble at all. It's all in the way one plans, and having a system about things."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Fosdyke; for she had her misgivings. In housekeeping it is only too often that two and two fail to make four.

* * * * *

Kersley Battersby, tall and handsome, coming in gayly at four o'clock on Thanksgiving afternoon, during a brief interval of the festivities at his brother's house, stopped short at the sight of Marcia's face.

"What's up?" he asked, reaching out his arms with the unconsciousness of habit, while Marcia, in her blue gingham gown, as mechanically retreated. Her tone was tragic.

"Ellen says she won't wait on the table; she says there's work for ten in the kitchen, and no lady would ask it of her. And I had it all arranged so beautifully. I don't know what we're to do. Kitty and I have been busy every minute, and Frank has had to take care of the babies all day. I didn't mean to make everyone so uncomfortable. He's gone out now, and she's upstairs with a headache."

"Well, you know you've always got me to fall back on," said Kersley, firmly. "My word, but the dining-room looks fine, though! I wouldn't know it for the same place." His gaze rested on the pretty scene with genuine admiration.

Loving cups in the corner of the room held the tall, yellow chrysanthemums against the florist's palms; yellow chrysanthemums waved from the vine-draped mantel and drooped from the prettiest loving cup of all over the yellow-lined lace centerpiece set on the satin-smooth "best" tablecloth. The silver was polished to perfection. The new goblets with their gilt flowers shone like bubbles, and on the sideboard a golden pumpkin hollowed into a dish among trailing vines was heaped high with yellow oranges and crimson apples and pearly hothouse grapes.

"Oh, yes, this is all right," sighed Marcia, "and the cooking is, and Frank has had his dress suit pressed and Kitty's gown is dear. But, Kersley, the _dinner_!" Her swimming eyes looked at him helplessly as she pushed back her disheveled hair. "You can't have nine courses with no one to serve them. Ellen even refuses to bring anything in. _We_ can't get up and keep running around the table! It makes the whole thing a failure--worse than that, ridiculous. I didn't mind how hard I worked for dear Mrs. Devereaux, but I did want it all to be right."

"Poor girl!" said Kersley, tenderly, moving sympathetically very, very near her, with a repetition of the arm movement. "You're tired."

"Now, Kersley, please don't." Marcia again retreated with glowing cheeks. She tried to keep an unexpected tremulousness out of her voice. "I have enough on my mind without having you, too. If I were to spoil all your prospects now, I'd never forgive myself."

"You get so in the habit of saying that absurd thing," began Kersley, doggedly, "that--Never mind, never mind, Marcia dear. I won't bother you now. But you'll have to let me have my way in one thing, anyway--I'm going to help you out; I'm going to stay and wait on the table myself."

"Kersley!"

"I'll make a bang-up waiter; do it in style."

"Kersley!"

"Just pretend I'm the butler. It's been done lots of times before, you know; it's not a bit original. And I'd like to do something for Mrs. Devereaux, too, good old multi-millionairess. I owe her one for being such a trump to you. I'll make her one of my omelets, too, if Ellen will let me."

"But Mrs. Devereaux will recognize you!" Marcia felt wildly that she was half assenting, in spite of the absurdity of it.

"Recognize the butler? She won't know that he exists except to pass her things. Besides, she's only seen me a couple of times."

"But the family party at your brother's?"

"They'll have to get along without me. I'll cut back now and tell them, and get my dress suit, and then I'll turn myself loose in your kitchen. It's all decided, Marcia." He smiled brilliantly down at her from the height of his six feet, as Kersley could smile sometimes, when he wanted to get his own way. His finger tips touched her curling locks on his way past the ottoman upon which she had dropped.

She sat there after he had gone, her chin supported by her hand, her dark eyes looking intently before her into the yellow chrysanthemum. In spite of her boast to Kitty that she was satisfied with "things as they were," there were moments when a long-drawn-out future of joy withheld pressed upon little Marcia with strange heaviness--moments when it was hard to be always wise for two; there were, indeed, sudden, inexplicable moments when she longed weakly to give herself up to the alluring blissfulness of Kersley's kisses on her soft lips, no matter how unpractical he was. But she was too stanchly eager to do what was best

for him to give way in the conduct of life; it was even a giddy sort of thing that she had given way to him in anything.

* * * * *

If a nervous and uncertain hilarity characterized the atmosphere of the dinner table that night, Mrs. Devereaux, in her black lace and diamonds, was happily unaware of its cause in the antics of the obsequious butler, who in the intervals of his calling threw kisses from behind the guest to the yellow-gowned Marcia, attempted to poise in the attitude of flight or that of benediction, or indulged in other pantomimes as extraordinary.

It was almost a relief when the intervals between the courses were unduly prolonged and conversation could proceed without spasmodic jerks on the part of the entertainers. Mrs. Devereaux herself, a rather slight, elderly woman with soft white hair elaborately arranged, and kind, brown eyes, responded with evident pleasure to Marcia's pretty, childlike warmth, and was politely cordial to Frank and Kitty. Her manner was at once quietly assured and quietly unassuming, although on her entrance her eyes had seemed furtively observant, as one who found herself among strange, if interesting, surroundings.

"I feel as if we might be Eskimos, by Jove!" Frank Fosdyke whispered with a secret gurgle to his wife, who responded only with an agonized "Hush!"

"This omelet is really delicious," said Mrs. Devereaux, kindly, in one of the pauses of the dinner. "I don't know that I have eaten one as good since I left Paris. May I ask if you have a woman or a man cook?"

"We have a man in the kitchen," said Marcia, unblushingly, Kersley being out there at the moment. "He has lived in Paris."

"Oh, the touch was unmistakable!" said Mrs. Devereaux. She turned graciously to Kitty. "I take a great interest in small establishments; my niece, Angela Homestead, is about to marry in moderate circumstances. Unlike many women in society, I have always looked after my own household. When I am at home the servants report to me for half an hour every morning to receive their orders for the day. So when Angela naturally came to me for advice, I said to her: 'Above all things, Angela, remember that a good cook is always worth what you pay for him.' The health of the family is so largely dependent on the food. With a French cook, a butler, a laundress and three maids, a simple establishment for two people can be kept up decently and in order; a retinue of servants is not necessary when you do not entertain. Of course, with less than three maids it is impossible to be clean."

"No, indeed," said Kitty.

"I should think not," assented Mr. Fosdyke, with unnecessary ardor.

"It is pleasant to have you agree with me," said Mrs. Devereaux, politely. "But, speaking of Paris, oddly enough, since we've been sitting here I have been reminded forcibly, though I can't imagine why, of a young man whom I met there a couple of times over a year ago--a tall, blond young artist who won a prize at the Salon. I haven't heard of him since, though he seemed to have rather unusual talent. I believe he left for New York. I can't recall his name, but perhaps you can help me to it. He painted children very fetchingly."

"Was it Kersley Battersby?" asked Marcia, with a swift frown at the owner of the name, who had doubled over suddenly.

"Kersley Battersby. The very man!" exclaimed Mrs. Devereaux, with animation. "How clever you are, my dear, to guess it! My sister, the Countess of Crayford, who has just come over this autumn, wants some one to paint her twin girls. It strikes me that he would be the very person to do it, if possibly you have his address. There was a sentiment, a bloom, one might call it, that seemed to characterize his children's heads particularly. They made a real impression on me."

"Yes, Battersby has a great deal of bloom," said Mr. Fosdyke, solemnly. "Bloom is what he excels in. Alphonse, fill Mrs. Devereaux's glass. I will look up his address in my notebook, Mrs. Devereaux. I have an impression that he is within reach."

He turned to Marcia provocatively, but she did not respond. Her brain was suddenly in a whirl that carried her past the wild incongruities of the situation. If Kersley had "prospects" like that--She did not dare to meet his eyes.

The dinner was excellent, the waiting perfect. Marcia was in a glow of happiness. She felt repaid for her work, her struggles, and the expenditure which would make a new gown this winter impossible. This was as she had wanted it to be--a little Thanksgiving feast for this woman who was her friend. Through all Mrs. Devereaux's interest in the others, the little inner bond was between her and Marcia. It did not matter that Ellen had stumped upstairs after the last cup of coffee, leaving Kersley to clear the table, or that the babies might wake up and cry. Nothing mattered when she knew that dear Mrs. Devereaux was pleased. She said to herself that this was what gave her such a strangely exhilarated feeling; and yet--When it was time for the guest to depart, and Marcia came from upstairs bringing Mrs. Devereaux's fur cloak, that lady and Kitty both looked smilingly at the girl from the midst of a conversation.

"Must you go so soon?" pleaded Marcia.

"Yes, the carriage is waiting," said Mrs. Devereaux. "I am under the doctor's orders, you remember, my dear. I've had a charming Thanksgiving; you don't know how much I appreciate Mrs. Fosdyke's letting me spend it here. And one thing has appealed to me particularly, if you won't mind my saying it: I am more complimented, more touched, by being made one of your little family circle, without any alteration in your usual mode of living, than by any amount of the ceremony which is often so foolishly considered necessary--a man behind each chair, masses of orchids, and expensive menus." She smiled warmly at Marcia, and added: "It is to you that I really owe my introduction into this charmingly domestic household. Your sister, however, has made me partner to a little secret, in response to my inquiries; she says that you are about to be engaged to the very Mr. Battersby of whom we were speaking, and whose address she has given me, so that I may make arrangements at once for my nieces' portraits. She tells me that he has excellent prospects."

"Oh!" murmured Marcia, in sudden crimson embarrassment. She could actually feel Kersley's triumphant smile behind the dining-room portières.

"And as I am about to start on the Egyptian tour that will take me away for a year, I want to know if I may take advantage of having been made one of the family and ask you to make use of my cottage at Ardsley for the honeymoon--which I hope may last until my return, if Mr. Battersby's commissions don't call him away before. I will have my people put it at your disposal."

"Dear, dear Mrs. Devereaux!" cried Marcia. If something odd in the beating of her heart made her feel her further speech to be foolishly incoherent, it was, perhaps, not unattractively so to her smiling elders.

She did not hear Mr. Fosdyke's exclamation as the lights of Mrs. Devereaux's carriage disappeared from view: "Of all the Arabian Nights' entertainments! Who am I, anyway?"

She had been drawn into the dining-room with Kersley's outstretched arms closing around her firmly as she mechanically but ineffectually strove to retreat, his blue eyes beaming down on her as he whispered:

"Oh, Marcia, Marcia! This comes of trying to show gratitude to strangers. ' _About to be engaged! _' Accepting a honeymoon cottage before you'd accepted the man!"

